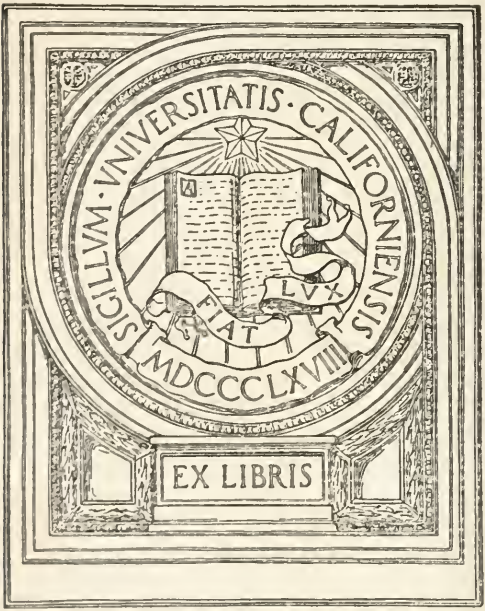
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



Benjamin John Leech
1898

CHAPTERS

ON

CHURCHYARDS.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN

BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY J. JOHNSTONE.

E L Holmes Leigh
1897

CHAPTERS

ON

CHURCHYARDS.

BY THE AUTHORESS

OF ELLEN FITZARTHUR, WIDOW'S TALE,
SOLITARY HOURS, ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH:
AND T. CADELL, LONDON.
MDCCCXXIX.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/chaptersonchurch02sout

PR
5459
S72c
v.2

CONTENTS OF VOLUME SECOND.

		PAGE.
ANDREW CLEAVES. . . .	Chap. I. - - - - - -	1
	Chap. II. - - - - - -	35
	Chap. III. - - - - - -	58
	Chap. IV. - - - - - -	73
	Chap. V. - - - - - -	91
	Chap. VI. - - - - - -	114
THE GRAVE OF THE BROKEN HEART. . . .	Chap. VII. - - - - - -	133
	Chap. VIII. - - - - -	155
	Chap. IX. - - - - - -	174
	Chap. X. - - - - - -	204
	Chap. XI. - - - - - -	229
	Chap. XII. - - - - - -	249
	Chap. XIII. - - - - -	276

20015

CHAPTERS

ON

CHURCHYARDS.

CHAPTER I.

ANDREW CLEAVES.

The Sabbath-day passed on as usual; its wonted calm, unbroken even by Josiah's eager anticipation of the morrow—for so early and so severely had Andrew inculcated the duty of a grave and solemn demeanour on the Lord's day, that the child had learnt to imitate his father's serious and mortified aspect, and his joyous laugh was rarely heard ringing through the house during those twelve long tedious hours; and, contrary to his usual vivacious habits, he was always anxious to go to bed very early on the Sabbath evening, and he had already

been some hours in a sweet and profound sleep, when his father came to bed on that last night preceding the important Monday.

If ever prayers were breathed from the heart, such were those of Andrew Cleaves, when, by the pale light of a cloudless moon, he knelt down at that solemn hour, beside the pillow of his sleeping child, who "looked like an angel as he slept," the tender moonbeams playing like a glory round those young innocent temples. Yes, if ever prayer came direct from the heart, such was that of Andrew Cleaves, at that solemn hour; yet never before were his whispered aspirations so broken, so faintly murmured, so devoid of all the graces of speech and metaphor. Over and over again his lips murmured—"Bless my child—bless him, oh Lord!" and then the words died away, and the heart only spoke, for its eloquence was unutterable; yet he continued near an hour in that holy communion; and when at length he rose up from his knees, and bending over his child, bowed his head to imprint the accustomed kiss, large drops rolled down his rugged features, and fell on the soft glowing cheek of the little sleeper.

Andrew Cleaves laid himself down to rest that night, with such thoughts as might, "if heaven had willed it," have matured even then to fruits of blessedness. But his time was not yet come. The rock was stricken, but as yet the waters gushed not freely out.

Daylight brought with it other thoughts, and more worldly feelings; and Andrew Cleaves rose up himself again, stout of heart and firm of purpose, remembering that he was to appear among men, and scorning to betray, before his fellow creatures any symptom of that tender weakness which he felt half humiliated at having yielded to in the sight of his Creator.

He roused the boy up hastily and cheerily, and hurried old Jenny in her breakfast preparations, and in completing the packing up of Josiah's box, and equipping him for his departure, and the new scene he was about to enter on, in a suit of bran new clothes, made, however, after the precise fashion of his first manly habiliments;—and Andrew himself was less methodical and deliberate than usual in his own proceedings, finding something to do, or to seek for, which hurried him hither and

thither, with a bustling restlessness very unlike his general clock-work movements.

He sat scarce five minutes at his breakfast, and had not consumed half his morning's portion of oatmeal porridge, when he started off to draw out the cart, and harness old Dobbin; and the box was locked and brought out—and the boy rigged at all points, like a little hog in armour—and the horse and cart at the door—and all ready, though Andrew professed he had believed it later than it really was, by a full hour, and the sooner they were off the better—so cutting short, with peevish impatience, the blubbering adieu of poor Jenny—just as Josiah was beginning to sob out in concert—and saying, "Up wi' ye, my man," he jerked him suddenly into the cart, and mounting himself, drove off at a rate that caused old Jenny to exclaim, "Lord save us, for certain master's bewitched!"—and greatly inconvenienced Dobbin, whose usual paces were every whit as sedate and deliberate as her master's.

It is not to be inferred, however, that he continued to urge on the venerable beast to those unnatural exertions throughout the whole five miles.

Andrew was so far a humane man, that he was "merciful to his beast," and once out of sight of home, permitted her to fall into her old jog-trot, taking the opportunity, after clearing his throat with sundry hums and ha's, to hold forth very lengthily to his young companion, on the new course of life he was about to enter on—the new duties he would have to fulfil—the zeal for learning—aptness, diligence, and perseverance, that would be expected from him—the care he was to take of his clothes, and his new Bible and Prayer Book, and the caution with which it would behove him to select intimates among his schoolfellows, many of whom might be wild, riotous chaps, given to such wicked ways as Andrew trembled to think of.

The boy had listened to this edifying exhortation—which had held on through four interminable miles, (for Andrew was always soothed and inspired by the sound of his own droning preachments,)—just as he had been wont to listen to the Rev. Mr. Leadbeater's hydra-headed sermons—in silence indeed, but with most disconsolate yawnings and twitchings, and indescribable fidgetings; but when his father came to the *head* of *Schoolfellows*, his

attention was instantly excited; and suddenly brightening up, and skipping over the prohibitory clauses of the discourse, he broke in on it with an inquiry of—whether the boys were like to be good hands at hoops and marbles?

An interruption so ill-timed and incongruous, would have drawn down a sharp rebuke on the heedless offender, but just as it was breaking from Andrew's lips, a sudden turn of the road brought them to the top of the last hill, overlooking the town of C——, which now opened at a short distance in full view of the travellers.

There—the father remembered he was to leave his boy—so the severe words died away upon his lips,—and the child looked, for the first time in his life, on the wonderful labyrinth of houses, churches, markets, and manufactories, that constitute a considerable county-town; and his amazement and delight broke forth with inexpressible vehemence.—"Ay,—it's all very fine, my man!" said the father, shaking his head—"A fine thing to look at, yon great city; and ye've seen nothing like it afore, poor innocent lamb; but God keep ye from the evil ways that are in it, and from the tents of the

ungodly!" So groaned Andrew; but nevertheless he drove on with his precious charge towards the tents of ungodliness, for he had worldly and ambitious views for the boy, and they were not to be forwarded in the desert.

The road wound quite round the brow of the hill in a somewhat retrograde direction, so as to alter the otherwise precipitous descent, into one more gradual and easy. On one side arose a wall of chalky cliff—on the other a steep slope of slippery down—so Andrew guided old Dobbin slowly and carefully round the promontory's brow; and on doubling the point, an unexpected and unwelcome sight saluted him. Just beneath, on a sort of green platform half way down the declivity, had stood, from times beyond the memory of man, an awful fixture, from which the eminence derived its designation of "Gallows-Hill." Round that fatal tree, and quite down the remaining descent, and ranged, ledge above ledge, up the chalky summit, the whole population of C—— seemed now assembled; yet such was the stillness of the vast multitude, that no sound, indicative of the scene they were approaching, had reached the ears of

Andrew or his son, till they came in full sight of it. Andrew Cleaves instinctively tightened his rein and halted abruptly, and the boy jumped up and caught hold of his father's arm, but uttered not a word, as he looked down breathlessly on the condensed living mass. At last he drew a long deep inspiration, and looked round in his father's face, the seriousness of which had darkened into unusual severity. Rather in answer to his own momentary surprise, than in reply to the boy's inquiring looks—Andrew uttered, in his deepest, lowest tone—"Ay, I see how it is—'Sizes are over, and there's an execution going forward.—So perish the guilty from the land!"

Andrew Cleaves would have been a sturdy champion for that faith, in the strength of which the valiant Bishop Don Hieronymo urged on the slaughter of the Infidels, with the shout of—"Smite them, for the love of God!" And under the Jewish dispensation, he would never have spared Agag, whatever he might have done by "the best of the sheep and oxen." So now twice over—yea, three several times, he fervently ejaculated—"So perish the guilty from the land!" concluding the third

repetition with a sonorous "Amen!" which was softly re-echoed by the tremulous voice of the unconscious child, who having been accustomed at home and at church always to repeat the word after the clerk or his father, now chimed in mechanically with the pious aspiration. "Amen!" quoth Andrew, and whipt on Dobbin, though rather perplexed at having to make his way through the close-wedged multitude. Andrew Cleaves, though a severe, was not a cruel man: Though a zealous advocate for the extreme rigour of the law, he took no delight in witnessing the actual execution of its dread sentence; neither did he desire that his innocent companion should thus prematurely behold a sight so awful. Therefore he pushed on as fast as possible, hoping to get clear of the crowd before the arrival of the Sheriff and the mournful cavalcade, which was slowly approaching. As they passed close to the foot of the gibbet, Josiah, glancing upwards at the fatal tree, shrunk close to his father, as if he would have grown into his very side; and now their onward progress became more difficult—almost impossible. The fatal cart was close at hand, and the curious people

thronged about it to catch a passing view of the condemned. It was in vain that Andrew urged on the old mare with voice and lash: she could not force a passage through the living wall, so he was fain to take patience and draw up to the side of the road, till the sad pageant had passed by. The crowd which had arrested his progress, impeded also the advance of the cart with its wretched burden; and during the time of its tedious approach, Andrew gathered from some of the bystanders, that the criminal, who was that day to meet an ignominious and untimely fate, was a mere youth, having barely attained his twentieth year; that he had been a boy of fair promise, till seduced by bad company, and evil example, into irregular ways, and lawless practices; which, proceeding from bad to worse, had at last involved him in the crime for which he was about to suffer, and which would surely bring down to the grave with sorrow the grey hairs of his unhappy parents, whose only child he was.

"Maybe they'll have to blame themselves for the ill deeds of their offspring. Maybe they'll have fallen short in setting him a good example, and in bringing him up in the fear of the Lord, and

the renunciation of sin and Satan," sententiously observed Andrew, firmly compressing his lips, and contracting his dark brows into their sternest and most awful expression.

"You're quite wrong there, master," indignantly retorted a woman, who was squeezed up close to the side of the cart, and whose hard-favoured countenance exhibited an expression little less saturnine than Andrew's; and, to use the vulgar phrase, far more "*evil*."—"You're quite wrong there, any way. Better Christians and honester folk never broke bread than that poor lad's parents; ay, and better parents too, though maybe a thought too proud and fond of him, for pride will have a downfall; and I always told 'em Joe wanted a tight hand over him; but it's too late now. God help 'em, poor souls, I say."

"Amen! Mistress," quoth Andrew. "Nevertheless, punishment is wholesome, for example's sake; and it's right guilt should suffer; and verily the parents of the lad, if they be, as you say, pious Christians, should rather rejoice in their affliction, and praise the Lord, that he is cut short in his wickedness."

"I say, 'praise the Lord!' indeed, that their only child should come to the gallows! A fine thing to praise God on!" growled the woman—yet more indignantly. "I wonder what some folk's feelings are made of? I say, 'praise the Lord,' indeed!"

"Woman!" snorted Andrew; but his expostulatory sentence was cut short by her angry vehemence, as she continued, in a taunting key,—

"Maybe you'll like, 'for example's sake,' to see that pretty lamb by your side with the rope round his neck some day. Maybe you'll praise the Lord for that, master!" and so saying, she stretched out her long bony arm, and laid her hand on the shoulder of the shuddering child, and when Andrew turned to rebuke her, and their eyes met, the expression of hers struck into his heart such a sensation of strange uneasiness, as caused him suddenly to draw the child beyond her reach; and long afterwards, for many and many a day, and when months and years had passed by, and the recollection of that scene had faded, and no particular circumstance occurred to revive it, that woman's face, and that peculiar look, would come across him, and again strike to his heart the same feeling of indefinite

horror, which impelled him, at the moment he actually encountered it, to snatch the boy from within the evil influence of her touch.

But at the time that painful sensation was as momentary as vivid, for all farther altercation was cut short by the pressure of the living mass, among which a general agitation, and a low confused murmur took place, as it fell back on either side, to make way for the fatal cart. The woman left off in the midst of a volley of revilings on Andrew's hard-heartedness, in her anxiety to press back in time to secure a snug place near the gibbet, where she might see all in comfort. And Andrew held his peace, and drew still closer to the road-side, as the cart came slowly on ; and as vulgar curiosity was not one of his besetting sins—(Andrew Cleaves's was by no means a vulgar mind, nor was his character a common one)—his eye followed not the broad eager gaze of the multitude, but looking downward, with serious, and not unbecoming solemnity, he raised his head only for an instant, and as it were involuntarily, just as the cart came abreast of his own vehicle, and the wretched criminal was so near, that in the deep stillness which had suc-

ceeded that prelusive murmur, his short, quick, laborious respiration, broken at intervals by a convulsive sob, was distinctly audible; and transient as was Andrew's involuntary glance, the object it encountered was not one soon to be forgotten. It was a sight, indeed, to touch a father's heart; and who could have beheld it unmoved?

The culprit, as has been said, was a mere youth. He appeared scarcely to have numbered twenty summers. A tall slim lad he was, almost effeminate in the transparent delicacy of his complexion, the profusion of fair silky hair which waved in disorder about his blue-veined temples, and the sickly whiteness of his long thin hands, one of which hung lifelessly over the side of the cart, in which he sat erect and stiffened, as if under the influence of some benumbing spell, (his eyes only wandering with a bewildered stare,) and seemingly incapable of attending to the clergyman, who was seated by his side, occasionally reading to him a few sentences from the Book of Common Prayer, and mildly exhorting him to join in some pious ejaculation, or penitential verse.

At such times, indeed, the wretched boy looked

for an instant towards the Book of Prayer, and his lips moved, but no articulate sound proceeded from them. Those quivering lips were parched and deadly white, but a spot of vivid crimson burnt on his hollow cheek, and the expression of his large blue eyes, distended to an unnatural roundness, was exceedingly ghastly. Occasionally he looked quickly and eagerly from side to side, and in one of those hurried glances his eyes met Andrew's, and at that moment his frame was convulsed with a universal tremor, and he faintly articulated the word "Father!" Right glad was Andrew Cleaves when the cart with its miserable burden, the Sheriffs with their attendants, and the whole dismal train, having passed onward, the people thronged after them to the place of execution, and he was once more at liberty to pursue his way, which he did with all possible expedition, urging on Dobbin with an energy he had never before ventured to exert on that steep declivity. But the sound of the agitated multitude, (that heavy, awful sound, like the swell of distant ocean,) was still audible, and Andrew speeded to get beyond it, and to reach C———, now within the distance of a few fur-

longs. All this while not a word had passed between the father and son; but just before they entered the town, Andrew looked round upon his child, who had remained, as it were, glued on to his side, both his little arms fast locked round one of his father's. He was very pale, and trembled like a leaf; and when his father spoke to him, and he tried to answer, the attempt produced only a deep choking sob, that burst out, as if his very breath had been pent up for ages; one or two hysterical catches succeeded, a broken word or two, the brimming eyes overflowed, and then the little heart was relieved and lightened—Oh! would the burden of elder bosoms was as easily breathed out! And he slackened his grasp of his father's arm, and began again to breathe and prattle freely.

Andrew fairly enough improved the opportunity of that awful sight they had just witnessed, by pointing out to his young companion the dreadful consequences of vice, and the danger of yielding to temptation, even by the most trifling deviation from moral and religious rectitude. They had just reached the entrance of C———, so the lecture was necessarily concluded; but Andrew failed not

to wind up his exhortation against the early inroads of sin, by inveighing, especially, against the particular guilt of waste and extravagance, charging his son to take extraordinary care of his new clothes, not to skuff out his shoes by unnecessary activity and acts of wanton mischief, nor to squander away his pocket-money in idle toys and sensual indulgences. The latter charge was particularly requisite, as Josiah took with him to school the capital of three sixpences in silver, and was to receive the stipend of twopence every Monday morning. He was moreover enjoined to keep an exact account of his expenditure; and his father presented him, for that purpose, with a long narrow ledger-looking account-book, all ruled and lined with red ink, under the heads of pounds, shillings, and pence.

Andrew's last charge was abruptly put an end to, by the rumbling of his cart-wheels over the stones of the High Street; and in two minutes, they had turned out of it into the Market-place, then through a long, narrow, back street, and at length drew up before a tall red house, with a bright green door, having on it a large plate of re-

splendent brass, whereon was engraved with sundry flourishes,—

"THE COMMERCIAL ACADEMY FOR
YOUNG GENTLEMEN,
KEPT BY THE REV. JEREMIAH JERK."

All matters concerning the admission of Josiah had been settled, and re-settled, over and over again, between the careful father and the Rev. Mr. Jerk, so the former had nothing more to do than to consign his precious deposit into the care of that respectable pedagogue, which transfer was the affair of a moment, for Andrew had his private reasons for brief leave-taking; so setting down his son at the door of his new abode, (where the master took the hand of his little pupil with that peculiar tenderness of manner so insinuating to the breaking hearts of new comers,) he laid his hand on the boy's head, and with an abrupt "God be with ye, my man!" was in his seat again, and off, and round the corner of the street, before the tears that had been swelling up into the little fellow's eyes had burst over their lids, and down his pale, quivering face, in all that agony of grief excited by the first

trial of the heart—the first pang of the first parting.

However cogent were the motives which decided Andrew Cleaves to decline the Rev. Mr. Jerk's proffered hospitality, he was by no means in haste to get home that day. He had business to transact with sundry corn-factors and graziers, and various other persons in C——, and altogether found —or made, so much to detain him there, though his concerns were wont to be more expeditiously transacted, that it was evening before he remounted his rumbling vehicle, and put Dobbin in motion, and quite dark before he reached the door of his own cottage. It was a cold evening, too—a cold, cheerless, bleak, March evening, and an east wind and a sleety rain had been driving in his face all the way home; and as he approached the cottage, its bright, blazing hearth glowed invitingly through the low casement, and reflected a red cheerful light on the half-open door, and streamed forward like a smile of welcome along the narrow gravel walk to the entrance wicket. And yet Andrew was in no haste to re-enter his comfortable home —Some hearts may guess why he lingered on the cold

heath—such as have felt the pang of returning to an abode, when all is as it was—except—that the light of life is extinguished—the jewel gone—the shrine left desolate.

But at last poor old Jenny came hurrying out at the sound of the cart-wheels, with her humble welcome, and wonderment at his late return, and offers of assistance in unharnessing Dobbin, that her master might the sooner come in and warm himself. Her well-meant kindness was rather gruffly declined, so she was fain to retreat within doors, and leave "Master," as she muttered to herself, in not the best of humours, "to please himself his own way;" (the most difficult thing in the world, by the by, to *some* folks in *some* moods,) and when at last he approached the fireside, and she ventured a cautious question as to how he left the dear child, she was snapt off with an injunction to mind her own business, and not trouble him with foolish questions. So, having set down his supper on the small table already prepared with its clean white cloth, and partaken of the meal in unsocial silence, she was dismissed to her own hovel, with an intimation that Andrew would himself put away the

fragments of the repast, and had no need of her further services that night.

What were Andrew Cleaves's special reasons for ridding himself so impatiently of old Jenny's company that evening, and what were his cogitations after he had locked her out, and himself in, and resumed his former station by the hearth and the little supper-table, we cannot exactly ascertain, though it is to be presumed they differed widely from those feelings of snug satisfaction, with which, after the old lady had set by him his pipe and his small glass of ale, he had been wont to lock her civilly out, and re-seat himself in his comfortable corner, with the sweet consciousness, that his child was sleeping peacefully in the little adjoining chamber, and that he should himself lie down to rest on the same bed, when the cuckoo flung open his small door in the old Dutch clock, and warned him it was time to retire.

Very different must have been his cogitations the night he dismissed poor Jenny so impatiently —for when the cuckoo warned, he still sat on unheeding, with his arms folded, his eyes fixed on the cold fireless hearth, where no spark had glimmered

for the last half hour—the pipe unlit, and the small glass of ale still untasted. But when the hour actually struck, it aroused him from his comfortless abstraction; and starting and shivering with a sensation of cold to which he had been till then insensible, he hastily swallowed down his temperate draught, and taking up the end of the candle, now flaring in its socket, and moving with the noiseless stealthy step acquired by long habits of carefulness for the slumbers of his little bedfellow, he entered his now solitary chamber, and shut himself within it—and what were his thoughts that night, his feelings, and his prayers, may he guessed by some hearts, but perhaps not fully conceived by any.

It would be hard to say whether the ensuing Saturday was more eagerly looked forward to by father or son. Certain it is, that when the morning of that day arrived, Andrew was in no less haste to be gone, than when he had harnessed old Dobbin to the cart so expeditiously on the preceding Monday. But when he reached C——, it was still too early to call for his boy, for Andrew, with all his impatience, would not on any account

have anticipated the precise moment when the half-holiday commenced—so he trafficked away the intervening time at his different places of call, and drew up the cart at the door of Mr. Jerk's Academy, just as the "young gentlemen" had risen from their Saturday's commons of scrap-pie and stick-jaw—certain savoury preparations not enumerated in the catalogue of that scientific professor Monsieur Ude, nor perhaps recommended by the late Dr. Kitchiner, but quite familiar to the palate of provincial schoolboys. Little Josiah, having just risen from the aforesaid banquet, came running to the door at the sound of the cart-wheels, choking with joy and the last huge mouthful of tenacious compound. In a moment he was up in his father's arms, and hugging him so tight round the neck, that Andrew was fain to cry out,

"Well, well, my man! but you'll not throttle your old dad, will ye? Have you been a good boy, Joey?"

Joey answered with a second hug, and the usher, who stood smirking at the door, satisfactorily certified the same; so the boy was sent to wash his greasy face and hands, and fetch his hat and

little bundle of Sunday clothes, and then his father lifted him up into the cart, and turning old Dobbin, and giving him the sign of departure, a brisk cherup and a propelling stamp, in a few minutes they were fairly out of C——, and on their glad way to the cottage. What were the boy's acclamations of delight at the first sight of its curling smoke, and dark brown thatch—and how, in spite of all Andrew's endeavours to set him right, he persisted in miscalculating time and space—and how often he fidgeted up and down on the seat—and how he took a heap of chalk in a distant field for the grey colt—and a flannel petticoat hung out to dry, for old Jenny *in propria persona*—and how his father went on pointing out the folly and unprofitableness of such crude guesses and rash assertions—and how the boy went on making them thick and threefold —those will be at no loss to conceive who have ever accompanied a lively urchin to his own home, on his first return after his first week's schooling.

They may also picture to themselves the actual arrival little Joey actually at home again—smothering old Jenny with kisses—squeezing the cat to a thread-paper—scampering down the gar-

den to see if his beans were come up—unhitching his hoop from the nail, and flinging it away, to run and see whether the grey colt was in the home croft—scrambling upon the back of his unbroken favourite, and racing round the field, holding on by its mane, not a jot the worse—as a finale—for being pitched right into the privet hedge, from whence, half rolling, half scrambling out into the garden, he came crawling up the gravel walk on all-fours, with that characteristic disregard of seriousness and propriety, which had so early evinced itself, in despite of his father's solemn admonitions and decorous example. Fortunately, on the present occasion, Andrew was absent unharnessing the mare, and there was nothing new to Jenny in the uncouth performance. When the first ebullition of joy had subsided, (or rather when the animal spirits were sobered by actual exhaustion,) Josiah was well content to sit on his little stool beside his father, close by the bright warm hearth, while Jenny lit the candle, and set on the kettle, and brought out the cups and saucers, and Josiah's own basin, full of the red cow's milk, set by for him at that evening's milking, and the hot oat cake, prepared for his espe-

cial regale. Then came the time for question and answer, and the father made minute inquiry into all school particulars, and his brow contracted a *little*, when Joey confessed that his three sixpences were gone; yea, melted away, expended to the last fraction; yet *how*, he could by no means explain even to his own satisfaction, though he counted over and over again, upon his little fat fingers, sundry purchases of pies, crabs, gingerbread, marbles, and pennyworths of brown sugar—the enumeration whereof by no means tended to unknit the puckers in his father's brow, who for that time, however, contented himself with a *short* lecture on prodigal expenditure. But Joey's bosom laboured with matter more important, and his little heart swelled indignantly, as, with a quivering lip, and broken voice, he began to recount a long list of the insults and mortifications to which he had been subjected. He had been the butt of the whole school, twirled about like a te-totum, while one pretended to admire the fashion of his clothes, and another asked if they were made by Adam's tailor, and a third, if his hat had belonged to his great-grandfather; and with that, clapping it on the crown, till his

little face was buried therein, and the broad brim rested on his shoulders, they called him little Amminadab, and bandying him about thus blindfold from one to the other, bade him complain to his dad, old "Praise-God-Barebones;" and then the poor little boy revealed to the indignant eyes of his father and Jenny, an awful fracture, which, in the progress of these mischievous sports, had nearly dissevered one of his long coat flaps, though the maid of the house had hastily tacked up the rent when his father called for him. Darker and darker Andrew's countenance had waxed, as he listened to the detail of these atrocities. Fearful was the contraction of his brow, the dilatation of his nostril, and the compression of his thin straight lips, when Joey, with an apprehensive side-glance and a suppressed tone of horror, pronounced the opprobrious cognomen which had been so irreverently applied to his own sacred person; and by the time all was unfolded, he had wellnigh made up his mind that his son should return no more to the companionship of such daring reprobates. But Andrew Cleaves was seldom guilty of hasty decision; and when his displeasure had time to cool, and he found reason to

be satisfied on the whole with Joey's further report of school progress, he thought it expedient to gulp down the unpalatable part of the narration, and to re-conduct his son to the Rev. Mr. Jerk's Academy at the expiration of the Sabbath holiday.

That Sabbath had passed, like all former ones at the cottage, undistinguished by any additional gleam of cheerfulness or innocent recreation; and by the time it was half over, Joey began to think of the morrow, and his return to school, with less repugnance than on the preceding evening. When Monday came, indeed, *home* was *home* again; and when the cart was ready, Joey ascended it rather dejectedly, consoling himself, however, with the thought, that Saturday would come round again in five days. Joey's calculations were correct for once:—Saturday came in five days, and he was fetched home again, and again returned rapturously to all its delights; and this time he had no grievance to relate; no, not though his broad-brimmed beaver had been clipped to a porringer, and his whole raiment exhibited such woful dilapidation, as to set at nought all Jenny's repairing ingenuity; for both coat-flaps were gone—annihilated—irre-

mediably abstracted—having been (as strongly indicated by certain suspicious appearances) actually singed off from the dishonoured garment. Still, in spite of Jenny's dismay, and his father's indignation, Joey persisted that all was well; and that he was now "very good friends with all his schoolfellows; that they were only very funny fellows; and if they *had* burnt off his coat-tails, a jacket was much more comfortable and convenient, especially for playing leap-frog."

In short, so perversely resigned was master Joey to the docking which had been inflicted on his "good grey frieze," that it might have been shrewdly inferred he had had a hand in the operation. Happily for him, no such suspicion insinuated itself into his father's mind, who was, however, highly scandalized at the whole proceeding, and carried into effect his determination of laying it before the Rev. Mr. Jerk, when Josiah returned to school. A conference with that gentleman, had, however, the effect, not only of prevailing on Andrew to pass over in silence the illegal curtailment of his son's week-day garb, but to permit the whole suit, as well as that set apart for Sundays, to be so far

modernised as no longer to subject the boy to the practical jokes of his mischievous companions.

Happy had it been for Andrew Cleaves if his parental disquietude had been excited by no causes more serious than the aforementioned. But, alas! innumerable vexations sprang up to embitter that weekly reunion with his child, at first so delightful to both parties. Every succeeding Saturday diminished Joey's eagerness to return to his home, his former pleasures, and his dumb favourites. Every succeeding Sunday beneath the paternal roof, hung heavier upon him than the former; and as his impatience increased, his weariness became more apparent, and the lessons of manly independence he had begun to learn among his playfellows, manifested their fruits in such acts of contumacy, as called down stern rebuke, and sometimes severe chastisement, from the hitherto indulgent father, —though Joey still stood too much in awe of the latter to venture on very open rebellion. So he became sullen, and silent, and incommunicative; and the unfortunate result of the father's undue severity, was to impress on the mind of the hitherto thoughtless and frank-tempered boy, the expedien-

cy of keeping to himself those idle frolics and venial trespasses, which, on his first return from school, had been boasted of, and confessed with an innocent confidence it should have been Andrew's care to confirm and encourage.

But Andrew, with all his fancied wisdom, was profoundly ignorant of the milder arts of training; and it was really on Scripture principles, erroneously applied, that as the boy grew older, he thought it his duty to treat him with increased severity, and to rebuke, with uncompromising sternness, those venial lapses, which, when candidly confessed, should have been commented on with lenient gentleness. Very soon Josiah learnt to anticipate the Sabbath holiday as a weekly penance; and ample amends did he make himself for its dulness and restraint, when he found himself once more among his merry mates in the school play-ground; and very soon Joey was noted for the most daring spirit of the whole riotous assemblage—"Up to everything"—the leader of all conspiracies—the foremost in all mischief—the most enterprising in all dangers—and, what was more remarkable, the readiest and most ingenious at equivocations, in-

ventions, and even unblushing falsehood, in cases of suspicion or detection. But as he became more knowing in all evil experience, his home deportment gradually manifested such an alteration as rejoiced the heart, and, at length, excited the highest hopes, of the credulous parent, whose boasted penetration failed him in detecting even the earliest artifices of infant cunning.

Joey's natural shrewdness soon found out the vulnerable points of his father's character; and that by affecting to copy his serious carriage and sententious speech; and now and then bringing home a new Psalm tune, or quoting a Scripture text, or relating, with well-feigned abhorrence, some anecdote of a reprobate schoolfellow, or pleading his want of some useful book, the old man was even prevailed on to undraw the strings of his canvass bag; and the young hypocrite's glee at obtaining substantial proofs of his ingenuity, was enhanced by his public triumph, when he rehearsed, in the circle of his thoughtless school-mates, the "capital acting" with which he had "come over the old gentleman."

In short, Master Joey's proficiency in these

thriving arts was such as would have done credit to an older head, and the pupil of a more fashionable establishment; and as his attainments in the ostensible branches of his education really kept pace with his supernumerary accomplishments, all went on seemingly as well as heart could wish; and Andrew's ambitious views for his son's future advancement took firm root in the groundwork of these fair appearances.

Andrew Cleaves was not a man to lay down plans with reservations—to make provident allowance for unseen circumstances—or to leave much to Providence. Neither did he ever decide in haste; but having once come to a determination, it was seldom qualified with the mental proviso—"If it please God."

So well considered, so fully matured, and so irrevocably fixed, were his parental plans.

Though still abiding in his father's humble cottage, and (comparatively with many of his neighbours) farming in a small way, Andrew Cleaves had contrived to scrape together a sum of money, on which many a more dashing spirit would have set up a one-horse chay, taken out a shooting li-

cense, and drank his bottle of port daily. But our farmer's ambition aimed at more remote objects. His savings were snugly deposited in a Banking-house at C——; where, however, they by no means lay in unprofitable security; and on certain considerations arranged among the parties concerned, certain engagements had been entered into, that, at a competent age, the young Josiah should be received as a clerk in the establishment; and from that office be further advanced, as after circumstances should warrant. Andrew uttered not a word of these projects to any human being, but he brooded over them in his own heart, till the grand object seemed so secure of attainment—so built up by prudence, and foresight, and calculation, as to bid defiance to all adverse circumstances of time, and change, and even of death itself. Poor man! And yet the uncertainty of life, and the vanity of worldly things, and the snares of riches and honours were ever in his talk, and in his mortified seriousness of aspect.

CHAPTER II.

Matters went on smoothly on the whole, till Joey had been full two years at school, and his third summer holidays were approaching.

They were no longer anticipated with the same impatient longing which had drawn his heart towards home in his earlier school-days; but still there *were* home pleasures, and home indulgences, not attainable at school, and foremost of those ranked the privilege of being master of his own time, and of the grey colt, now become a well-disciplined, yet spirited steed, and destined to succeed to the functions of blind Dobbin, whose faithful career was fast drawing to a close.

In the meantime, Joey was permitted to call young Greybeard *his* horse, and was indulged in the pride and happiness of driving it himself the first time its services were put in requisition to

fetch him home for the Christmas holidays. But when the *summer* vacation arrived, Joey's return was ordained to be in far other and less triumphant order. It so chanced, that on the very day of breaking up, a great annual fair was held at C——, which was looked forward to as a great festival by the boys whose parents and friends were resident there. These youngsters had vaunted its delights to Joey, and one especial friend and crony had invited his schoolfellow to go with him to his own house, and stay the two days of the fair. Now it unluckily fell out that these identical two days occurred at a season most important to Andrew—just as his hay-harvest was getting in, and there was reason to expect the breaking up of a long spell of dry weather. So when Joey returned to school on the Monday, he was enjoined to tell his master (with whom Andrew had no time for parlance,) that it would not be convenient for his father to fetch him home the ensuing Thursday, or indeed (on the account before-mentioned) till the Saturday evening.

Andrew, engrossed by his rural concerns, had not thought of the fair, of which Joey took particular care not to remind him, as he well knew,

that were he to give the least hint of his schoolfellow's invitation, and his own vehement longing to accept it, his father would fetch him away at the risk of sacrificing his whole hay crop, rather than leave him exposed to the danger of mixing in such a scene of abomination.

Master Joey, whose genius was of a very inventive nature, soon arranged in his own mind a neat little scheme, which would enable him to partake the prohibited delights, unsuspected by his father or the Rev. Mr. Jerk; so trimming up to his own purpose his father's message to that gentleman, he ingeniously substituted for the request that he might be allowed to stay at school till Saturday,—an intimation that he had obtained parental permission to accept his schoolfellow's invitation for the fair days, and that a neighbour's cart would take him home on Friday evening, from the house of his friend's parents. Joey *had his* own plans for getting home too when the fun was over, and of managing matters so dexterously, that the truth should never transpire either to his father or master. The latter was easily imposed on by the boy's specious story; and when Thursday arrived, Joey,

200615

taking with him his little bundle of Sunday clothes, and his whole hoard of pence and sixpences, left school in high spirits with a party of his playmates.

Andrew Cleaves, meantime, got in his crops prosperously, and, exhausted as he was by a hard day's labour, set out on Saturday evening to fetch home the expecting boy. Poor Greybeard was tired also, for he too had worked hard all day; but he was a spirited willing creature, and went off freely, as if he knew his errand, and rejoiced at the thought of bringing home his young master. So the farmer and his vehicle arrived in good time at the door of the Academy; but Andrew looked towards it in vain, and at the upper and lower windows, for the happy little face that had been wont to look out for him on such occasions.

The servant girl who opened the door looked surprised when Andrew inquired for his son; and still greater astonishment appeared in Mr. Jerk's countenance, when he stepped forward and heard the reiterated inquiry. A brief and mutual explanation ensued—a grievous one to the agitated father, whose feelings may be well imagined—irri-

tated as well as anxious feelings, for on hearing the master's story, little doubt remained in his mind but that the truant was still harboured at the house of his favourite schoolfellow. But the intelligence promptly obtained there, was of a nature to create the most serious alarm. The parents of Josiah's friend informed Andrew, that his boy *had* accompanied *their* son home when the school broke up on Thursday morning—they having willingly granted the request of the latter, that his playfellow might be allowed to stay with him till an opportunity occurred (of which he was in expectation) of his returning to his father's the next evening. That after dinner the two boys had sallied out into the fair together, from which *their* son returned about dark without his companion, with the account that they had been separated the latter part of the day; but that just as he began to tire of looking about for his schoolfellow, Josiah had touched him hastily on the shoulder, saying, a neighbour of his father's who guessed he was playing truant, insisted on taking him home in his own cart, and that he *must* go that moment. This was all the boy had to tell—and that Josiah vanished

in the crowd so suddenly he could not see who was with him.

Vain were all possible inquiries in all directions. The distracted father could only learn further, that his child had been seen by many persons standing with his friend at many booths and stalls, and, at last, quite alone in a show-booth, belonging to a set of tight-rope and wire dancers, and of equestrian performers—with some of these he seemed to have made acquaintance, and among them he was last observed. That troop had quitted C—— the same night, and having fine horses and a light caravan, must have travelled expeditiously, and were probably already at a considerable distance; nor could the route they had taken be easily ascertained after they had passed through the turnpike, which had been about ten o'clock at night. Now it was that Andrew Cleaves, in the agony of his distress, would have given half his worldly substance to have obtained tidings—but the least favourable tidings of his lost child; for dreadful thoughts, and fearful imaginings, suggested themselves, aggravating the horrors of uncertainty. There was no *positive* reason for belief that the boy had left

C—— with the itinerant troop. A rapid river ran by the town—there was a deep canal also—and then the wharf—crowded with barges—between which———But Andrew was not one to brood over imaginary horrors in hopeless inaction, and the opinion of others encouraged him to hope that his son had only been lured away by the equestrian mountebanks. With the earliest dawn, therefore, mounted on the young powerful grey, he was away from C——, and (according to the clew at last obtained) in the track of the itinerants. But they were far in advance, and soon after passing through the turnpike, had struck into cross country-roads and by-ways, so that the pursuit was necessarily tedious and difficult; and Andrew was unused to travelling, having never before adventured twenty miles beyond his native place. No wonder that he was sorely jaded in body and mind, when he put up for the night at a small town about thirty miles from C——, through which he ascertained, however, that the caravan, with its escort, had passed early in the morning of the preceding day—that the troop, while stopping to bait, had talked of Carlisle as their next place of exhibition ; and had,

in fact, struck into the great north road when they proceeded on their way. Andrew could gain no intelligence whether a boy, such as he described, accompanied the party. It having been very early morning when they baited their horses at ——, the females of the band and children (if their were any) were still asleep within the closed caravan.

So Andrew proceeded with a heavy heart, but a spirit of determined perseverance—and his pursuit (now that he was fairly on the track of its object) was comparatively easy.

About mid-day, in mercy to his beast, as well as to recruit his own strength, he halted at a hedge alehouse, when, having unsaddled Greybeard, and seen that he was taken care of, he entered the kitchen and called for refreshment. There were many persons drinking and talking in the place, and Andrew failed not to make his customary inquiries, which awakened an immediate clamour of tongues—every one being ready with some information relating to the troop Andrew was in pursuit of. Such was the confusion of voices, however, that he was kept for a moment in painful suspense, when a decent-looking woman, (appar-

ently a traveller,) who was taking her quiet meal in one corner of the kitchen, came hastily forward, and laying her hand on Andrew's arm, and looking earnestly in his face, exclaimed,—"After what are ye asking, Master? Is it for a stray lamb ye're seeking—and hav'n't I seen your face before?" Andrew shook like a leaf. The man of stern temper and iron nerves, shook like an aspen leaf, while the woman looked and spake thus earnestly: —"Have ye, have ye found him?—have ye found my boy?" was all he could stammer out. "You are a stranger to me; but God bless you, if you can give me back my boy!"

"I am *not* a stranger to you, Andrew Cleaves; and I *can* give you back your boy, and the Lord bless him for your sake, for you saved me and mine, and took us in, and gave us meat and drink when we were ready to perish. Come your ways with me, Andrew Cleaves; but soft and quiet, for the laddie's in a precious sleep. He *has* come to hurt, but the Merciful watched over him."

So she led him softly and silently through a little back kitchen, and up a steep dark stair, into a small upper chamber, before the casement of which

a checked apron was pinned up, to exclude the full glow of light from the uncurtained bed. Softly and silently, with finger on lip, she drew him on to the side of that humble bed, and there, indeed, fast locked in sleep, in sweet untroubled sleep, lay the little thoughtless one, whose disappearance had inflicted such cruel anxiety and distress.

The boy was sleeping sweetly, but his cheeks and lips were almost colourless; a thick linen bandage was bound round his head; and over one temple, a soft, silky curl, that had escaped from the fillet, was dyed and stuck together with clotted blood. Andrew shuddered at the sight; but the woman repeated her whispered assurance, that there was no serious injury. Then the father knelt softly down beside his recovered darling, his head bent low over the little tremulous hand that lay upon the patchwork-counterpane. Almost involuntarily his lips approached it; but he refrained himself by a strong effort, and, throwing back his head, lifted his eyes to Heaven, in an ecstacy of silent gratitude; and, one after another, large tears rolled down over the rough, hard-featured

face, every muscle of which quivered with powerful emotion. Yes, for the first time in his life, Andrew Cleaves poured out his whole heart in gratitude to his Creator in the presence of a fellow-creature; and when he arose from his knees, so far was he from shrinking abased and humiliated from the eyes that were upon him, that, turning to the woman, and strongly grasping her hands in his own, he said, softly and solemnly, "Now I see of a truth, that a man may cast his bread upon the waters, and find it again after many days. I gave thee and thine orphan babe a little food and a night's shelter, and thou restorest to me my child. While Andrew Cleaves has a morsel of bread, thou shalt share it with him." And he was as good as his word; and from that hour, whatever were, in other respects, his still inveterate habits of thrift and parsimony, Andrew Cleaves was never known to "turn away his face from any poor man."

By degrees all particulars relating to Joey's disappearance and his providential recovery, were circumstantially unravelled. The little varlet had been accidentally separated from his schoolfellow, and while gaping about the fair in search of him,

had straggled towards the large showy booth, where feats of rope-dancing and horsemanship were exhibited. Long he stood absorbed in wondering admiration of the Merry-Andrew's antic gestures, and the spangled draperies and nodding plumes of the beautiful lady who condescended to twirl the tambourine, and foot it aloft, "with nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles," for the recreation of the gaping multitude. Others of the troop came in and out on the airy stage, inviting the "ladies and gentlemen" below, to walk in, with such bland and cordial hospitality, that Joey thought it quite irresistible, and was just stepping under the canvass when a strong arm arrested him, and a splendid gentleman, in scarlet and gold, demanded the price of entrance. That was not at Joey's command, for all his copper hoard was already expended, so he was shrinking back, abashed and mortified, when one or two idlers of the band, probably seeing something promising about him, and that he was a pretty, sprightly, well-limbed lad, whose appearance might do credit to their honourable profession, entered into a parley with him, and soon made out that he was playing truant at that very moment,

and apparently blessed with such an adventurous genius, as, with a little encouragement, might induce him to join the company, and succeed to the functions of a sharp, limber urchin, of whom inexorable death had lately deprived them. So Joey was let in gratis; and there he was soon translated into the seventh heaven of wonder and delight at the superhuman performances of his new acquaintances. He had, as it were, an innate passion for horses, and the equestrian feats threw him into fits of ecstacy. Then all the gentlemen and ladies were so good-natured and so funny! and one gave him a penny-pie, and another a drop of something strong and good; and then the manager himself—a very grand personage—told him, if he liked, he should wear a blue and silver jacket, and ride that beautiful piebald, with his tail tied up with flame-coloured ribbons. *That* clinched the bargain; and in a perfect bewilderment of emulation and ambition—wonder and gratitude—gin and flattery—poor Joey suffered himself to be enrolled in "The Royal Equestrian Troop of Signor Angelo Galopo, di Canterini."

Forthwith was he equipped in the azure vest-

ments of the deceased Bobby, and indulged with five minutes sitting on the back of the beautiful piebald; after which, on the close of the day's performance, he made one of the jovial and unceremonious party round a plentiful board, where he played his part with such right good will, and was so liberally helped to certain cordial potations, that long before the end of the banquet, his head dropt on the shoulder of his fair neighbour, the lovely Columbine, and in a moment he was fast locked in such profound slumber, that he stirred not hand or foot, till so late the next morning, that the caravan (in a snug birth, whereof he had been securely deposited) had long passed the small town, where Andrew had halted on his first day's chase.

Joey's awakening sensations were nearly as astonishing as those of Abon Hassan, when he unclosed his eyes in his own mean mansion, after his waking vision of exaltation to the throne of the Caliph. Poor Joey, who had fallen asleep in the intoxication of supreme enjoyment and gratified vanity, among knights and ladies, glittering with gold and spangles, himself radiant in all the glories of the blue and silver, and the fancied master

of the prancing piebald—found himself, on awaking, stowed away into a corner of the dark, suffocating, jolting caravan, of course divested of his finery, huddled up on a bag of straw, and covered with a filthy horse-rug. The whole ambulating dormitory was heaped with similar bedding, from which peeped out heads and arms and dirty faces, which Josiah was some time in assigning to the blooming heroines of the preceding evening. At last, however, he satisfied himself of the identity of the lovely Columbine; and as she lay within reach, and had taken him under her especial protection, he made bold to pluck her rather unceremoniously by the outstretched arm, which salutation had the desired effect of rousing the fair one from her innocent slumbers, but only long enough to obtain, for Joey, a sound box of the ear, and a drowsily muttered command, to "lie still, for a little troublesome rascal." So there he lay, half frightened, and half repentant, and quite disgusted with his close and unsavoury prison, from whence his thoughts wandered away to the pleasant cottage on the thymy common—his clean, sweet, little chamber, where honeysuckle looked in at the window—his break-

fast of new milk and sweet brown bread—his own little garden and his bee-hives, and Greybeard, that paragon of earthborn steeds.

But then came in review, the rival glories of the piebald, and Joey's remorseful feelings became less troublesome, and he longed ardently for the hour of emancipation. It came at last; a brief and unceremonious toilet was despatched by the female group; and great was Joey's indignation, when in lieu of the silver and azure, or his own good raiment, he was compelled to dress himself in the every-day suit of his deceased predecessor—a most villanous compound of greasy tatters, which, had he dared, he would have spurned from him with contemptuous loathing; but a very short experience, and the convincing language of a few hearty cuffs, accompanied with no tender expletives, had satisfied him of the danger of rebellion, and he was fain to gulp down his rising choler, and the scraps of last night's meal, which were chucked over to him, as his portion of the slovenly breakfast.

In the meantime, the door and little square window of the caravan had been thrown open, and at last the machine came to a full stop on the high-

road, by a hedge-side, and the ladder was hooked to the high door-way, and the manager, who, with his spouse, had occupied a back compartment of the van, descended to review his cavalry, while the equestrians snatched a hasty meal dispensed to them by their associated Hebes.

There was the piebald shining in the morning sun, in all the perfection of piebald beauty—pawing, and sidling, and curving inward his graceful neck, and small elegant head, as if impatient of the rein by which he was led at the side of a large Flemish-looking mare. At sight of his appointed palfrey, Joey was about to scramble down the ladder after Signor Angelo, when the latter most uncourteously repelled him, with such a push as sent him sprawling backwards on the floor of the caravan, and more than revived his late incipient feelings of disgust and repentance. But now the whole party, females and all, held parley of no very amicable nature about the door of their migratory council-chamber. The success of the late performance at C—— had by no means been such as to sweeten the manager's temper, or to harmonize the "many minds" he had to deal with; and loud, and surly,

and taunting accusations and recriminations were bandied about, the most acrimonious of which, Joey soon gathered, related to himself, and to some dispute respecting him, which had occurred the preceding night, after they had deposited him in his luxurious resting place. It appeared, that some of the party had even then begun to think with apprehension of the danger to which they exposed themselves by the abduction of a boy, whose father had ample means to pursue and punish them, should he discover that his son had left C—— in their company. These prudent suggestions were made light of by others of the troop; words had run high even then, and the insides and outsides had arranged themselves for the night in no very placable moods. During the many silent hours of darkness they had jogged and jolted in company, almost every one, however, in his secret mind, came over to the side of the doubters; and when at last they halted and called council, each accused the other of having caused the present dilemma. From words they proceeded to rough arguments, and at length to something very near a general battle, in which their fair companions, descending from "their high

estate," took part so heartily, that Joey, finding himself quite unobserved, seized the opportunity to scramble down after them; but in his haste to reach *terra firma* he missed his footing, and fell headlong among the horses, already fretted and fidgety at the disorder of their riders, so that Joey's sudden precipitation set them rearing and pawing furiously, and he—the luckless truant!—received such a kick on the head, from the hard hoof of the ungrateful piebald, as not only completely stunned him, but left him such a ghastly and bloody spectacle, as stilled in a moment the uproar of the conflicting parties, and made them unanimous in their apprehensions of the serious consequences in which they might all be involved, should the accident prove fatal, of which there was every appearance. The child had ceased to breathe —not the faintest pulsation was perceptible. The panic became general, and the decision immediate, to consider their own safety, by moving on as fast as possible, leaving the unhappy boy (who was pronounced quite dead) on the grass bank by the road side.

In two minutes the troop was in motion—in ten

more, quite out of sight—and there lay poor Joey to all appearance a corpse, and soon to have become one in reality, but for the providential intervention of that poor woman, by whom Andrew Cleaves was conducted to the bedside of his recovered child. That woman (as she briefly explained to Andrew on their stealthy progress towards the little chamber) was, indeed, the poor soldier's widow, who, with her orphan babe, had owed to his compassion, in her utmost need, the seasonable mercy of a night's lodging and a wholesome meal; and she had never forgotten the name of her benefactor, nor thought of him without a grateful prayer. She had travelled far on to her dead husband's birthplace in the Scotch Highlands, to claim, for his orphan and herself, the protection and assistance of his kindred. Her claims had not been disallowed, and among them she had dwelt contentedly till her child died. *Then* she began to feel herself a stranger among strangers, and her heart yearned towards her own country and kinsfolk; and she wrote a letter home to her own place, Manchester, the answer to which told her, that her friends, who were too poor to help her when she was left a widow,

were now bettered in circumstances, and would give her a home and welcome; and that, now she had no living hinderance, she might obtain a comfortable subsistence by resuming her early labours at the loom. So she set out for her native place, a leisurely foot traveller, for she was no longer unprovided with means to secure a decent resting place and a wholesome meal; and she it was, who, having so far proceeded on her way, had discovered the young runaway lying by the way-side in the condition before described. Her feelings (the feelings of a childless mother!) needed no incentive to place her in a moment beside the forlorn deserted child, whose head she tenderly lifted on her bosom, and parting off the thickly-clotted hair, bound her own handkerchief about his bleeding temples. There was water within reach, with which she laved his face and hands, and had soon the joy of perceiving a tremulous motion of the lips and eyelids—and at last the boy breathed audibly, and his large black eyes unclosed, and he uttered a few words of wonder and distress, among which—"Oh, father! father!" were most intelligible; and to the woman's gentle inquiry of "who was his

father? and did he live far off?" he answered faintly, that he was the son of Andrew Cleaves, who lived at Redburn.

A second fit of insensibility succeeded those few words, but they were sufficient for the widow. Providence had sent her to save (she trusted) the child of her benefactor, and all her homely but well-directed energies were called into action. Partly carrying him in her own arms, and partly by casual assistance, she succeeded in conveying him to the nearest dwelling, that small way-side inn. There he was put comfortably to bed, and medical aid obtained promptly—the longer delay of which must have proved fatal. And then a message was sent off to Farmer Cleaves, (a man and horse, for that poor woman was a creature of noble spirit, and impatient to relieve the father's misery,) and then the widow quietly took her station by the pillow of the little sufferer. His head had undergone a second dressing, and the surgeon had pronounced, that all would go well with him, if he were kept for a time in perfect quiet. It need not be told how rigidly that injunction was attended to, nor how carefully, when he was in a

state to be removed, the father conveyed back his truant child to the shelter of his own peaceful cottage—nor how anxiously he was nursed up there to decided convalescence—nor how solemnly, yet tenderly, when the boy was so far recovered, his father set before him the magnitude of his offence, and the fatal consequences which had so nearly resulted from it. Joey wept sore, and looked down with becoming humility, and promised, over and over again, and really with a sincere intention, never, never again to give his father cause for uneasiness or displeasure.

Time travelled on—school-days and holidays revolved in regular succession—and Joey comported himself just well enough to gain the character of a very good scholar in school, and a very idle dog out of it, except at home and in his father's sight, when he comported himself with such a show of sanctity and correctness, as was quite edifying to behold, and too easily lulled to rest the awakened caution of the still credulous old man.

CHAPTER III.

Andrew had continued his son at the Academy to an unusually advanced period of youth, from the difficulty of knowing how to dispose of and employ him profitably, during the interregnum between school and the earliest time of admission into the counting-house, where, at the proper age, he was to be articled. At last, however, in consideration of his really forward and excellent abilities, the gentlemen of the firm consented to receive him; and now the time arrived when the human bark was to be launched from its supporting cradle into the tumultuous stream of active life. Insomuch as it advanced him, in his own estimation, to the honour and dignity of confirmed manhood, Josiah was elated at the change; but had he been left to follow the lead of his own inclinations, to a surety *they* would not have hoisted him up with a pen be-

hind his ear, before a dingy desk in a dark, gloomy counting-house, there to pore away the precious hours he could have disposed of so much more agreeably. Had Joey been allowed to choose his own lot in life, to a certainty he would have enrolled himself a bold dragoon, a dashing lancer, a trooper of some denomination,—anything that would have clothed him in a showy uniform, and given him the command of a horse; but all military professions were so abhorrent to Andrew Cleaves, that he would as lieve have placed his son in the Devil's Own, as in "The King's Own;" and the boy was too well aware of his father's inveterate prejudices, even to hint at his own longings; still less did he hazard the more debasing avowal, that he would have preferred the situation of a dashing groom to a station at the desk; and that to be a jockey, a *real*, *knowing*, Newmarket jockey! (he had heard a vast deal about Newmarket,) would have been the climax of his ambition. Happy disposition, to qualify him for the staid clerk of a commercial establishment! But knowing the decree was irreversible, he submitted to it with a tolerably good grace, consoling himself with the reflection,

that many young men so situated were nevertheless very fine fellows, and contrived, at odd hours, evenings, and holidays, to idemnify themselves very tolerably for their hours of durance vile. He had great confidence, moreover, that good fortune would introduce him to some of those choice spirits, whose experience would initiate him into many useful secrets.

Joey's expectations were but too well founded; temptation lies in wait for youth at every turning and by-path; but when youth starts with the design of voluntarily entering her fatal snare, the toils are wound about the prey with treble strength, and rarely, if ever, is it disentangled. Joey was soon the associate and hero of all the idle and dissolute youth in C——; the hero of cock-fights, of bull-baitings, of the ring, of the skittle-ground, of every low, cruel, and debasing sport, that prepares the way, by sure and rapid advances, through all the gradations of guilt, towards the jail, the convict ship, and the scaffold.

Nevertheless, for a considerable time, Josiah contrived to keep up a very fair character with his employers—so clear and prompt was his despatch of

business, and (with very few exceptions) so punctual and assiduous his attention to office hours. Beyond those seasons, their watchfulness extended not, and no glaring misdemeanour, on the part of their young clerk, had yet awakened any degree of suspicious vigilance.

The heart of Andrew Cleaves was, therefore, gladdened by such reports of his son's *official* conduct, as, coming from so respectable a quarter, were, in his estimation, sufficient surety of general good conduct, and he was consequently lulled into a fatal security, not even invaded by any of those vague and flying rumours, which generally lead the way to painful but important discoveries. Andrew Cleaves had no friends, it could scarcely be said, any acquaintance—alas! it is to be feared, no well-wishers. Beyond the cold concerns of business, he had maintained no intercourse with his fellow men. His world was a contracted span; two objects of interest occupied it wholly—his wealth and his son. But there was no equipoise between the scales that held those treasures. He would not, in Shylock's place, have been in suspense between "his ducats and his daughter."

Gold *had been* his idol, till superseded by that living claimant, to whose imagined good all other considerations became secondary and subservient, and for whom (looking to worldly aggrandisement as the grand point of attainment, though Andrew talked well of "the one thing needful") he continued to improve upon his habits of parsimony and accumulation, so as to deny himself the common comforts becoming necessary to his advancing years. But the hard gripe occasionally relaxed at the persuasive voice of Josiah's eloquence; and that hopeful youth, as he advanced in the ways of iniquity, made especial progress in its refined arts of specious hypocrisy, to which, alas! his early training had too favourably disposed him.

It would be a tedious and distasteful task minutely to trace the progressive steps by which Josiah attained that degree of hardened profligacy, which marked his character by the time he had completed his nineteenth year—the second of his clerkship in Messrs. ———'s counting-house. The marvel is, that his seat on the high office stool had not been vacated long before the expiration of that period. The eyes of his employers had for

some time been open to his disreputable and ruinous courses. Their keen observation was of course upon him in all matters that could in any way affect their own interests; and at length, on that account, as well as from more conscientious motives, which ought to have had earlier influence, they deemed it requisite to arouse the fears of the still-deluded parent, and to recommend his interference, to avert, if possible, the dangerous career of his infatuated son. Alas! it was a cruel caution, for it came too late. Too late, except to excite the father's fears to a sudden pitch of agony, which provoked him to bitter upbraidings, and violent denunciations, and thus contributed to sear the already corrupted heart of the insensate youth, and to accelerate his desperate plunge into irretrievable ruin.

It was well known at C—— that Andrew Cleaves had (for a man in his station) amassed considerable wealth, and that his idolized and only son would inherit it undivided; and in that confidence, there were not wanting venturous and unprincipled persons, who not only gave him credit in the way of trade, to an unwarrantable amount,

but even advanced him loans from time to time, on the speculation of future re-payment with usurious interest. By such means, added to the not inconsiderable gratifications he at different times obtained from his father, under various specious pretences, Josiah had been enabled to run a course of low and profligate extravagance, far exceeding anything which had entered into the suspicions of his employers, or the tardily aroused apprehensions of the distressed father. Among the threats of that abused parent, there was one which Josiah doubted not would be promptly executed—a public advertisement in C——, that Andrew Cleaves held himself nowise answerable for any debts his son might think proper to contract—an exposure which would not only cut him off from all future supplies, but probably create such distrust of his hitherto undoubted heirship, as to bring forward all the claims standing against him, and irritate his father, beyond hope of accommodation.

But the idea of absconding from C—— had long been familiar to Josiah, and he had for some time past been connected with a set of characters, whose daring exploits, and communication with the me-

tropolis, had fired his ambition to emulate the former, and to transfer his genius to a theatre more worthy its enterprising capabilities. *Yet* Josiah's heart was not *quite hardened.* It had not lost *all pleasant* remembrance of his days of boyish happiness—of the indulgences of his father's dwelling, and of the repressed, but ill-dissembled fondness of that doting parent, whose proud and severe nature, had even accommodated itself to offices of womanly tenderness, for the feeble infant left motherless to his care.

There were still moments—even in the circle of his vile associates—even in the concerting their infamous schemes—or while the profane oath still volleyed from his tongue, and the roar of riotous mirth and licentious song resounded—there were moments, even then, when recollection of better things flashed across his mind, like angels' wings athwart the pit of darkness, and he shuddered with transient horror at the appalling contrast.

The faint gleam of such a mental vision still haunted him at the breaking up of a riotous meeting, during which he had finally arranged with his confederates the plan which was to remove him

(probably for ever !) from C—— and its vicinity. "But I will have one more look at the old place before I go," suddenly resolved Josiah, when he had parted from his companions. "At least I will have a last look at the *outside* of the walls—though I *can't* go in—I *can't* face the old man, before I leave him; he would not pass over what can't be undone—and there's no going back *now*—but I *will* see the old place again."

It was late on the Sabbath evening when Josiah formed this sudden resolution; and so quickly was it carried into effect, that it wanted near an hour to midnight when he reached the low boundary of the cottage garden.

It was a calm, delicious night of ripening Spring —so hushed and still, you might have heard the falling showers of overblown apple blossoms. Josiah lingered for a moment with his hand on the garden wicket; and while he thus tarried, was startled by a sudden but familiar sound from the adjacent close. It was the winnying salutation of his old friend Greybeard, who, having perceived, with fine instinct, the approach of his young master and quondam playmate, came forward, as in

days of yore, to the holly hedge, which divided his pasture from the garden, and poking his white nose through the old gap betwixt the hawthorn and the gate, greeted him with that familiar winny.

"Ah, old boy! is it thou?" said the youth, in a low hurried voice, as he stopt a moment to stroke the face of his faithful favourite. "Dost *thou* bid me welcome home, old fellow? Well—that's something!" and a short unnatural laugh finished the sentence, as he turned from the loving creature, and with quick, but noiseless steps, passed up the garden walk to the front of the quiet cottage.

Quiet as the grave it stood in the flood of moonlight; its lonely tenant had long since gone to rest, and no beam from hearth or taper streamed through the diamond panes of the small casements.

The prodigal gazed for a moment on the white walls—on the honeysuckle already flowering round his own casement—then stept within the porch, and softly, and fearfully, as it were, raised his hand to the latch—which, however, he lifted not—only softly laid his hand upon it, and so with eyes rooted to the ground, stood motionless for a few

minutes, till the upraised arm dropt heavily; and with something very like a sigh, he turned from the door of his father's dwelling, to retrace his steps towards C——.

Yet once again in his way down the garden path, he turned to look on the home he was forsaking. At that moment the evil spirit slept within him, and his better nature was stirring in his heart. The repose of night—its "beauty of holiness"—the healing influence of the pure fresh air—the sight of that familiar scene—nay, the fond greeting of his dumb favourite—the thought for what purpose he was there—and of the old man who slept within those silent walls, unconscious of the shock impending over him in the desertion of his only child—all these things crowded together with softening influence into the heart of that unhappy boy, as he turned a farewell look upon the quiet cottage; —and just then a sound from within smote his ear faintly—at first, a faint, low sound, which deepened by degrees into a more audible murmur, and proceeded surely from his father's chamber. Josiah started—"Was the old man ill?" he questioned with himself—"Ill and alone!" and without far-

ther parley, he stept quickly but noiselessly to the low casement, and still cautiously avoiding the possibility of being seen from within, gazed earnestly between the vine-leaves through the closed lattice. The interior of the small chamber was quite visible in the pale moonshine—so distinctly visible that Josiah could even distinguish his father's large silver watch hanging at the bed's head in its nightly place—and on that bed two pillows were yet laid side by side, (it was the old man's eccentric humour,) as in the days when his innocent child shared with him that now solitary couch. But neither pillow had been pressed that night—the bed was still unoccupied; and beside it knelt Andrew Cleaves, visibly in an agony of prayer—for his upraised hands were clasped above the now bald and furrowed brow. His head was flung far back in the fervour of supplication—and though the eyelids were closed, the lips yet quivered with those murmuring accents, which, in the deep stillness of midnight, had reached Josiah's ear, and drawn him to the spot. It was a sight to strike daggers to the heart of the ungrateful child, who knew too well, who felt too assuredly, that for him,

offending as he was, that agonizing prayer was breathed—that his undutiful conduct and sinful courses had inflicted that bitterness of anguish depicted on the venerable features of his only parent. Self-convicted, self-condemned, the youthful culprit stood gazing as if spell-bound, and impulsively, instinctively, *his* hands also closed in the long-neglected clasp of prayer—and unconsciously *his* eyes glanced upward for a second, and *perhaps* the inarticulate aspiration which trembled on his lip, was, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Yet such it hardly could have been—for that touching cry, proceeding from a deeply stricken heart, would have reached the ear of Mercy, and, alas! those agitated feelings of remorse, which might, "if Heaven had willed it,"

Have matured to penitence and peace,

were but the faint stirrings of a better spirit doomed to be irrevocably quenched ere thoroughly awakened.

The tempter was at hand, and the infatuated victim wanted moral courage to extricate himself by a bold effort, while there was yet time, from the

snare prepared for his destruction. Just at that awful moment, that crisis of his fate, when the sense of guilt suddenly smote upon his heart, and his better angel whispered, " Turn—yet turn and live !"—at that decisive moment a rustling in the holly hedge, accompanied by a low whistle, and a suppressed laugh, broke on his startled ear; and, as if a serpent had stung him, he sprang, without one backward glance, from the low casement and the cottage walls—and almost at a bound he cleared the garden path, and dashed through the little gate, which swung back from his desperate hand with jarring violence.

Those awaited him without from whom he could not brook the sneer of ridicule—with whom he had mocked at and abjured all good and holy things, and with whose desperate fortunes he had voluntarily embarked his own; and well they knew the hold they had upon him, and having at that time especial motives to desire his faithful adherence, they had dodged his steps to the lone cottage, under a vague suspicion, that if an interview should take place between the father and son, Na-

ture might powerfully assert her rights, and yet detach the youth from their unholy coalition.

"The children of this world *are*, in their generation, wiser than the children of light." They guessed well, and too well succeeded in securing their victim; and before Josiah had half retraced the townward way, with his profligate companions, his mind was again engrossed by their nefarious projects, and all that had so recently affected him —the whole familiar scene—the low white cottage —the little chamber, and the aged man who knelt beside that lonely bed in prayer for an offending child—all these things had faded like a vision from his unstable mind; and secretly humiliated at the recollection of his momentary weakness, the miserable youth bade an eternal adieu to the paths of peace and innocence, and gave himself up to work evil unreservedly.

CHAPTER IV.

The flood-gates of accusation and information once set open, innumerable tongues that had never stirred to give timely warning to a person so inaccessible and unpopular as was Andrew Cleaves, were voluble in pouring in upon him charge upon charge against the son who had been so lately, not less the darling than the pride of the old man's heart. And many a one with whom he had had weekly dealings, who had refrained from speaking *the word in time* which might have saved a fellow creature from destruction, because their *own* pride was offended by the reserve of the austere old man, now sought him even in his lonely dwelling, to multiply upon him humiliating proofs of his misfortune, and professions of sympathy and compassion, that would have been gall and wormwood to his proud spirit, if the overwhelming conviction of

his son's deceptive and profligate conduct had not already humbled it to the dust. He heard all patiently and in silence, attempted no vindication of himself, when the comforters obliquely reflected on his blind credulity, by observing, that they "had long seen how matters were going on," that they "had suspected such and such things from the first," that they "had always looked sharp after their own boys, thank God, but then they were ordinary children—no geniuses;" for it was well known how Andrew Cleaves had prided himself on his child's superior abilities: and the self-sufficient man, who had so long held himself pre-eminent in wisdom, qualified to rebuke and instruct others, now listened with a subdued spirit to the torrent of unasked and impertinent advice, which sounded sweet and pleasant to the ears of the intrusive utterers, if it fell harshly and unprofitably on those of the unhappy hearer.

On the Sabbath morning immediately succeeding that Saturday, in the course of which Andrew Cleaves had been subjected to this spiritual martyrdom, he went twice as usual to his parish church; but during divine service, his eyes were never lift-

ed, even during sermon time, so much as to the face of the minister, and his deep sonorous voice mingled not that day with those of the village choristers; and in going and returning, he shunned all passing salutation, and once within his own threshold, the cottage door was closed on all intruders, (for presuming on his present circumstances such were not wanting to present themselves,) and no human eye again beheld him, till that of his undutiful child, drawn to his chamber window at the still midnight hour, looked upon the distress he had occasioned. Not in vain had been the long and uninterrupted communing of Andrew Cleaves with his own heart and with his God. Sweet to him were the uses of adversity, for they had not to struggle with a heart of unbelief, neither with one seared by vicious courses, nor debased by sensual indulgence. The spiritual foundation was sound, though human pride, inducing moral blindness, had raised on it a dangerous superstructure. But when the hour came, and the axe (in mercy) was struck to the root of the evil, and the haughty spirit bowed down in self-abasement, then was the film withdrawn from his mental vision, and Andrew Cleaves

really looked into himself, and detected his besetting sins in all their naked deformity. Yes,—at last he detected his pride, his worldliness, his worship of the creature, encroaching on that due to the Creator. He felt and confessed his own utter insufficiency, and laying down at the foot of the cross the burden of his frailties and sorrows, he sought counsel and consolation at the only source, which is never resorted to in vain. As he proceeded in the work of self-examination, and self-arraignment, his heart relented towards his offending child. Had he yielded *something* of his own inflexible determination to the boy's known disinclination for the line of life marked out for him, the parental concession might have established in reality, that gratefully filial confidence, the semblance of which had been so artfully assumed; and the father's heart was wrung with its bitterest pang, when he called to mind the sanctified hypocrisy, which had so long imposed upon him, and reflected that his own mistaken system and erroneous measures, his own boasted example of superior sanctity, might have been the means of ingrafting it on his son's character. The fruit of that night's vigil was a determi-

nation on the part of Andrew, to depart the next morning for C——, and seek out his erring child—not with frowns and upbraidings, but the more effective arguments of tender remonstrance, and mild conciliation; to inquire into and cancel whatever pecuniary embarrassments he had incurred; and, having done so, to say, "My son, give me thine heart!" and then—for who could doubt the effect of such an appeal?—to consult the lad's own wishes with regard to a profession, as far as might be compatible with maturer reason and parental duty. So resolved, and so projected Andrew Cleaves during the sleepless watches of that Sabbath night; but when morning came he found himself unable to act on his determination so immediately as he had intended. The conflict of the spirit had bowed down the strong man. He arose feeble and indisposed, and altogether unequal to the task he had assigned himself. Therefore, as the delay of four-and-twenty hours could not be material, he determined to pass that interval in deliberately re-considering his new projects, and in acquiring the composure of mind which would be so requisite in the approaching interview with Josiah. Early on

the morrow, however, with recruited strength, and matured purpose, he hastily despatched the morning's meal, and was preparing to depart for C——, when the sound of approaching footsteps, and the swinging to of the garden gate, made him pause for a moment with his hand on the latch; and almost before he could lift it, the door was dashed rudely open, and three men presented themselves, one of whom stationed himself just without the threshold, while the two others stepping forward threw down a warrant on the table, abruptly declaring, that, by its authority, they were empowered to make search for, and arrest, the body of Josiah Cleaves. Their abrupt notice fell like a thunderclap on the ear of the unfortunate old man; and yet, for a moment, he comprehended not its full and fatal sense, but stood as if spell-bound, upright, immovable, every muscle of his strong features stiff as in the rigidity of death, and his eyes fixed with a stony and vacant stare on the countenance of the unfeeling speaker. And yet the man was but outwardly hardened by his hateful occupation. His heart was not insensible to the speechless horror of that harrowing gaze. His own eyes fell

beneath it, and in softened tones of almost compassionate gentleness, he proceeded to explain, that in the execution of his duty, he must be permitted to make strict search over the cottage, and its adjacent premises, in some part of which it was naturally suspected the offender might have taken refuge, with the hope of remaining concealed till the first heat of pursuit was over. As he spoke, Andrew Cleaves gradually recovered from the first effects of that tremendous shock. His features relaxed from their unnatural rigidity, and by a mighty effort, subduing the convulsive tremor which succeeded for a moment, he regained almost his accustomed aspect of stern composure, and in a low, but steady voice, calmly demanded for what infraction of the laws his son had become amenable to justice. The appalling truth was soon communicated. In the course of the past night, the counting-house of Messrs. ——— had been entered by means of skeleton keys; access to the cash drawer, the strong box, and other depositories of valuables, had been obtained by similar instruments, and considerable property, in notes, gold, and plate, abstracted by the burglars, who had escaped with their booty,

and as yet no traces of their route had been discovered. Then came the dreadful climax, and the officer's voice was less firm as he spoke it, though every softened accent fell like an ice-bolt on the father's heart—His son—his only child :—his own Josiah, had been the planner—the chief perpetrator of the deed. A chain of circumstances already elicited—evidence irrefragable—left no shadow of uncertainty as to his guilt, and the measure of it; and though he was known to have had accomplices, perhaps to have been the tool of more experienced villany, his situation of trust in Messrs. ———'s firm, and the advantage he had taken of it in the perpetration of the robbery, deservedly marked him out as the principal offender, after whom the myrmidons of justice were hottest in pursuit.

The miserable parent listened in silence to the officer's brief and not aggravated communication. He heard all in silence, with a steady brow, and a compressed lip, but with looks rooted to the ground; and when all was told, bowing down his head, he waved his hand with dignified submission, and calmly articulating, " It is enough, do your duty," seated himself in his old elbow-chair, from whence

he stirred not, and neither by word, look, or gesture, gave further token of concern in what was going forward, while the ineffectual search was proceeding. When it was over, and the officers, after a few well-meant but unheeded words of attempted comfort, left him alone with his misery, he was heard to arise and close the cottage door, making it fast within with bar and bolt; and from that hour, no mortal being beheld Andrew Cleaves, till, on the third day from that on which his great sorrow had fallen upon him, he was seen slowly walking up the High Street of C——, with an aspect as composed as usual, though its characteristic sternness was softened to a milder seriousness, as if the correcting hand of God had affixed that changed expression, and his tall, athletic form, hitherto upright as the cedar, bent earthward with visible feebleness, as though, since he trode that pavement last, ten added years had bowed him nearer to the grave. His calamity was generally known, and as generally commiserated; for even those whose contracted hearts, and mean tempers, had taken unchristian delight in mortifying the Pharisaical and parental pride of a man so arro-

gant in his prosperity, now that the hand of the Lord lay heavily on him, were affected by the sacredness of a sorrow, for which there was no balm in human sympathy, and were awed by the quiet dignity of his silent resignation. As he passed on, many a hat was touched with silent respect, whose wearer he was personally unacquainted with, and many hands were extended to his, by persons who had never in their lives before accosted him with that kindly greeting.

To those who addressed him with a few words of cordial but unavailing concern and sympathy, he replied without impatience, but with a brief and simple acknowledgment, or a lowly uttered—"God's will be done;" and withdrawing himself, as soon as possible, from the cruel kindness of his comforters, he betook himself, with all the undiminished energy of his uncommon character, to transact the business which had urged him forth into the haunts of men, in the first nakedness of his affliction. To satisfy the demands of tradespeople and other inhabitants of C——, who had claims on his unhappy son, was his first concern, as it had been his intention before the last stroke of ruin; and

that done, he repaired to the banking-house of Messrs. ———; and having ascertained the actual loss those gentlemen had sustained by the late robbery—and setting aside even their own admission, that others had assisted in the perpetration, and partaken of the booty with his unhappy boy—he proceeded, with unwavering inflexibility of purpose, to make over to them, without reservation or condition, the entire sum of his long-accumulating wealth, of which their house had been the faithful depository; and the first faint sensation of relief which lightened the heart of the afflicted father, was that when he received into his hands, not an acquittance of his son's criminal abstraction, from which he well knew Messrs. ——— could not legally absolve him,—but an acknowledgment of such and such monies paid into the establishment, as due to it on account of his son Josiah. That payment reimbursed the firm within a trifle of their actual loss, and the deficiency was made good to them in a fortnight, by the sale of a few acres of Andrew's paternal farm—the little patrimony he had tilled and cultivated with the sweat of his brow, in the natural and honest hope of transmit-

ting it entire and unalienable to his decendants, though destined, in his fond anticipation, to form but an inconsiderable portion of the worldly wealth to which he aspired for his young Josiah. The greater part of the land in the occupation of Andrew Cleaves, was held on renewable leases,—a term whereof expiring about the time of his great calamity, he resigned the whole into his landlord's hands.

The concern, though considerable, had hitherto been but the healthful and salutary occupation of his hale and vigorous age, and its annual bringings in were still added to the previous hoard, for him who was to inherit all. But that great stimulus was gone for ever. For whom should he now toil?—for whom should he accumulate? For whom —to what, look forward? "To Heaven," was the fervent response of his own heart, when the desolate old man thus mused within himself, but with earth what more had he to do? "Sweet are the lessons of adversity." His elder sin—his abstract covetousness—was dead within him. The few paternal acres with which he had begun the world, would more than furnish a sufficiency for his con-

tracted wants, and even afford a surplus to reserve for future exigencies; and in calculating those, he thought far less of his own desolate old age, than of the wretched exile, whose cry might come from afar to the ear of his forsaken parent, should disease and misery fall upon him, and the associates of his guilt leave him to perish in his helplessness. It was a miserable hope, but still it *was hope*, and it lent the old man energy and strength to ply his rural labours, in their now contracted space, with almost undiminished activity.

Weeks slipped away,—weeks—months—a year —four years. Four years had come and gone since the day that left Andrew Cleaves a worse than childless father,—the forlorn tenant of his paternal cottage, which, with its appendencies of barn, outbuildings, and a few fields, was all that *then* remained to him of his previous prosperity.

Four years had passed since then, and the old man still lived. The same roof still sheltered him, the same small garden still yielded its produce to his laborious hands. But that small dwelling, and that poor patch of ground, and its adjoining slip of pasturage, a crazy cart, one cow, and one old horse,

—(the favourite grey colt, now white with age,)—these were all the possessions that Andrew Cleaves could now call his own in the wide world. A cry *had* come from afar,—the appeal of guilt and misery,—and it came not unheeded. Again and again the father's heart was wrung, and his straitened means were drained to the uttermost, to supply the necessities, or, alas! the fraudulent cravings of the miserable supplicant. And now and then professions of contrition, and promises of reform, served to keep up the parent's hope; and old and impoverished as he was, he would have taken up his staff and travelled uncounted leagues, to have thrown himself upon the outcast's neck, and received into his own bosom the tears of the repentant prodigal. But under various pretences, the wretched youth still evaded all propositions of this nature, though his communications became more frequent—more apparently unreserved—more regular and plausible, and at last came such as, while he read them, blinded the old man's eyes with tears of gratitude and joy. It was an artfully constructed tale. The eloquence of an itinerant preacher had touched the stony heart. Then came

the hour of conversion—of regeneration—of justification—of peace unspeakable! Pious friends had rejoiced over their converted brother—had associated him in their labours,—deeming him a fit instrument to convince others, himself a shining testimony of the power of grace,—and then points of worldly consideration were cautiously introduced. For him there was no safety in his native land. But other lands offered a refuge—a decent maintenance—above all, a spiritual harvest,—and thither, by many unquestionable tokens, he felt himself called to labour in the vineyard. A little band of elect Christians were about to embark themselves and families for a distant mission. To them he was, as it were, constrained in spirit to join himself,—and then came the pith and marrow of the whole—the point to which these hypocritical details had tended—to his kind parent, his forgiving father, he looked for the pecuniary assistance necessary to fit him out for a long voyage and distant establishment. And there were references given to "Reverend gentlemen," and "serious Christians;" and letters confirming Josiah's statement were actually addressed to Andrew Cleaves by

more than one pious enthusiast, blessed with more zeal than discretion, whose credulity had been imposed on by the pretended convert.

This well-concerted story was but too successful. All lurking doubts were discarded from Andrew's mind, when he succeeded in ascertaining that the letters addressed to him were actually written by the persons whose names were affixed as signatures —names long familiar to him in the pages of the Evangelical Magazines, and Missionary Registers. "Now may I depart in peace," was the old man's inward ejaculation, as, full of joyful gratitude, he despoiled himself of nearly his last earthly possessions, to forward what he believed the brightening prospects of his repentant child. The reversion of his cottage and garden and the small close, was promptly, and without one selfish pang, disposed of to a fair bidder, and an order for the sum it sold for as quickly transmitted to the unworthy expectant, together with a multifarious assortment of such articles as the deceived parent, in his simplicity of heart, fondly imagined might contribute to the comfort and convenience of the departing exile. A few good books were slipt into the package, and

Josiah's own Bible and Prayer Book were not forgotten. Involuntarily the old man paused as he was carefully enfolding the former in its green baize cover; involuntarily he paused a moment, and almost unconsciously opened the sacred volume, and on the few words written on the fly leaf two-and-twenty years before by his own hand, his eyes dwelt intently till the sight became obscured, and a large drop falling on the simple inscription, startled the venerable writer from his fond abstraction.

Day after day, the now comforted but anxious father, expected the coming letter of filial acknowledgment. Day after day, procrastinating the tasks on which depended his whole subsistence, he was at C—— by the hour of the mail's arrival, and evening after evening he returned to his solitary home, his frugal, alas! his now scanty meal, sick at heart with "Hope deferred," yet devising plausible pretences for retaining the blissful illusion. But at length its fading hues were utterly effaced—no word—no letter—no communication came; silence, chilling, withering, deathlike silence held on its palsying course; and once more divested of all earthly hope, Andrew Cleaves leant wholly for support on

the staff which faileth not in direst extremity. But the fiery trial had not reached its climax. The gold was yet to be more thoroughly refined, yea, proved to the uttermost.

CHAPTER V.

THREE months had elapsed since the last day of Andrew's short-lived gladness, when a rumour reached him, which had been for some time current at C——, that his unhappy son had been seen in the neighbourhood, and recognised by more than one person, in spite of the real and artificial change which had taken place in his appearance; that he had been observed in company with suspected characters, some of whom were believed to be connected with a gang of horsestealers, whose depredations had lately proceeded to an audacious extent in C—— and its vicinity; and that two houses had lately been broken open, under circumstances that evidenced the skilful practice of experienced thieves. The painful warning came not to an incredulous ear. That of the unhappy father was but too well prepared for the worst that might betide. But

this vague perception of impending calamity—this indefinite anticipation of something near and terrible—was, of all his painful experiences, the most difficult to endure with Christian equanimity.

For many days and nights after he heard that frightful rumour, Andrew Cleaves knew not an hour of peaceful thought, nor one of quiet slumber. However employed—in his cottage—in his garden—if a passing cloud but cast a momentary shadow, he started from his task, and looked fearfully abroad for the feet of those who might be swift to bring evil tidings. And in the silence of night, and during the unrest of his thorny pillow, the stirring of a leaf—the creaking of the old vine stems—the rustling of the martin on her nest under the eaves—sounded to his distempered fancy like steps, and whispers, and murmuring voices. And once, when the night-hawk dashed against his casement in her eccentric circles, he started from his bed with the sudden thought (it came like lightning) "was it possible that *he*—the guilty one—the wretched—the forsaken, might have stolen near, under the shadow of night, to gaze like the first outcast Cain, on the tents of peace, from which

he was for ever exiled?"—"Oh! *not* from hence —not from his father's roof!" was the old man's unconscious murmur, as, under the influence of that agitating thought, he flung open the cottage door, and stept out into the quiet garden. There was no sign nor sound of mortal intrusion,—no foot-print on the dewy herb-bed beneath the casement, betraying its pressure by the exhalation of unwonted fragrance. The old horse was grazing quietly in his small pasture. The garden gate close latched, and no objects visible on the common to which it opened, but the dark low pyramids of furze, distinct in the cloudless starlight. And soon that feverish fancy passed away from the old man's mind, as the balmy air played round his throbbing temples, and he inhaled the wafting of that thymy common, and listened to the natural tones of midnight's diapason, and gazed fixedly on the dark blue heaven, and its starry myriads,

> "For ever singing as they shine,
> 'The hand that made us is divine.'"

Ten days had dragged on heavily, since Andrew Cleaves's mournful tranquillity had been thus ut-

terly overthrown. During all that time he had not ventured beyond his own little territory. The weekly journey to C——, with his cart-load of rural merchandise, (the produce of his garden and his dairy,) had been relinquished, though its precarious sale now furnished his sole means of subsistence. But towards the end of the second week, finding himself unmolested by fresh rumours or corroborations, he began to take hope that the whispers of his son's re-appearance in the neighbourhood might have arisen on vague suspicion, or the slight ground of fancied or accidental resemblance. So reasoning with himself, the old man shook off, as far as in him lay, the influence of those paralysing apprehensions, and his morbid reluctance to re-enter the busy streets of C——, where he felt as if destined to encounter some fresh and overwhelming misfortune. But though Andrew Cleaves's iron nerves and powerful mind had been thus enfeebled, by his late trial of torturing suspense, he was not one to encourage vague forebodings, or give way to pusillanimous weakness; so, girding up his loins for renewed exertions, he loaded his little cart with its accustomed freight, and,

as cheerfully as might be, set off for C—— market. By the time he reached it, bodily exercise and mental exertion, co-operating with change of scene and variety of objects, had, in a great measure, restored to him his usual firmness and self-possession, and he transacted his business clearly and prosperously—provided himself with such few articles of home-consumption as he had been accustomed weekly to take back from C——, and once more set his face homeward, inwardly blessing God that he was permitted to return in peace.

As he turned the corner of Market Street, into that where stood the Court-house, in which the Magistrates were holding their weekly meeting, his progress was impeded by an unusual crowd, which thronged the doors of the building, with an appearance of uncommon excitation. Andrew was, however, slowly making way through the concourse, when two or three persons observed, and recognised him—and suddenly a whisper ran through the crowd, and a strange hush succeeded, and all eyes were directed towards him, as the people pressed back, as though, in sympathetic concert, to leave free passage for his humble vehicle.

But the old man, instead of profiting by their spontaneous courtesy, unconsciously tightened his reins, and gazed about him with troubled and bewildered looks. In a moment he felt himself the object of general observation, and then his eyes wandered instinctively to the Court-house doors, from whence confused sounds proceeded, and at that moment one or two persons from within spoke with the eager listeners on the steps—and the words—"Prisoner" and "committed," smote upon Andrew's ear, and the whole flashed upon him. As if struck by an electric shock, he started up, and, leaping upon the pavement with all the agility of youthful vigour, would have dashed into the Justice Hall, but for a firm and friendly grasp which forcibly withheld him. Wildly striking down the detaining hand, he was rushing forward, when himself and all those about the doors were suddenly forced back, by a posse of constables and others descending the Court-house steps, and clearing the way for those who were conducting the prisoner to jail. And now it was, that the poor old man, overcome by agonizing expectation, leant heavily and unconsciously on the friendly arm, which a moment before he had dash-

ed aside with impatient recklessness. Cold drops gathered upon his forehead—he breathed short and thick, and his sight became misty and imperfect, as he strained it with painful intensity towards the open door-way. But it cleared partially, as the expected group came forth. Three persons only—the middlemost a hand-cuffed, guarded felon, whose downcast features, haggard, and dark, and fierce—and shadowed by a mass of coarse red hair, were seen but for a moment, as he was hurried short round the corner of the Court-house to the adjacent prison. But the old man *had* seen them—he had seen enough—a genial glow diffused itself through his shivering frame— and with a burst of renovated energy he clasped his upraised hands forcibly together, and cried out with a piercing voice—"It is *not* he—Oh, God! it is not *he*." It *was* a piercing cry! The prisoner started, and half turned—but he was hurried off, and the crowd had already closed in between him and Andrew Cleaves, who, recovering a degree of self-possession, looked up at last to note and thank those who had befriended him in his agony. Everywhere—from all eyes—he encountered looks of compassionate in-

terest, and distressful meaning—and no one spoke but in some low whisper to his neighbour—and again Andrew's heart sunk with a strange, fearful doubt. But had he *not* beheld with his own eyes? —That dark gaunt countenance!—Those fiery elf locks!—"*That* could not be my curly-headed boy —You saw it was not he!" the old man faintly uttered, as his eyes wandered with imploring anxiety from face to face, and resting at last on that of the friend whose arm still lent him its requisite support, read there such a page of fearful meaning, as scarce needed the confirmation of words to reveal the whole extent of his calamity. But the words were spoken—the few and fatal words, which dispelled his transient security. They sounded on his ear like the stunning din of rushing waters, yet were they low and gentle; but his physical and mental powers were failing under the rapid transitions of conflicting passions, and overtasked Nature obtained a merciful respite, by sinking for a time into a state of perfect unconsciousness.

It needs not to detail the particulars of that last daring exploit which had been the means of consigning Josiah into the hands of justice, nor of the

progressive circumstances, which had drawn him back, step by step, with the hardened confidence of infatuated guilt, to receive the punishment of his crimes on the very spot where he had first broken through the laws of God and man. Neither will we attempt to trace the journal of those miserable weeks that intervened between his committal to the county jail and his trial, which came on at the next assizes. Still less may we venture to paint minutely, the first meeting of parent and child, in such a place, under such circumstances:—on one side, the overwhelming agony of grief and tenderness:—on the other, the callous exterior of sullen insensibility, and sneering recklessness, and unfilial reproaches, "sharper than a serpent's tooth." It is too painful to dwell on such a scene—too harrowing to depict it. Rather let us pass on to the brighter days of that awful interval, which was most blessed in its prolongation. Light from above penetrated the depth of the dungeon. The prayer of faith prevailed. The sinner's heart was touched; and at last the tears of the repentant son fell like balm upon the father's bosom. From *that* hour the gracious work was gradually perfected. The

good seed, though mixed with tares, had been sown already in Josiah's heart; and God gave time in mercy, that the parental hand which had first sown it there, should, with gentle and dear-bought experience, revive the long hidden and unfruitful germ, and cherish it into life everlasting. The father's labour of love had been ably seconded by the Christian zeal of the officiating chaplain, who was unremitting in his visits to the prisoner's cell, especially at those times when imperious necessity detained Andrew Cleaves at his own desolate home, or forced him more unwillingly into the public haunts. But when (as was not unfrequent) Mr. Grey found the father and the son together, it was very affecting to observe with what a chastised and humbled spirit the aged man acknowledged his *own* deficiencies—his *own* need of instruction, and his own earnest desire to profit by the spiritual teaching, and pious exhortations, addressed to his unhappy son. Mr. Grey's voice not seldom faltered with emotion, as he looked on his two hearers, the eyes of both fixed on him with such earnest reverence!—of the beautiful youth!—and the old grey-haired man! and both so near the grave!

The awful hour approached of Josiah's arraignment before an earthly tribunal, but his trial did not come on till the last day of the assizes. Its result was inevitable, had the cause been defended by the ablest counsel in the land; but no defence was attempted:—all had been pre-arranged between the father and son; and when the latter in a low but steady voice pleaded "Guilty" to the charge against him, and in spite of merciful dissuasion from the Bench itself, firmly persisted in that plea, and it was finally recorded, the aged parent who had accompanied him into Court, and borne up through all the preliminary forms with unshaken fortitude, bowed his head in token of perfect acquiescence with that decisive act, and yielding at last to natural weakness, suffered himself to be led away, as the Judge arose to pronounce sentence.

On the evening of the day preceding that appointed for his execution, far different was the scene in Josiah's cell, from what it presented in the earlier stages of his imprisonment. Its occupants were the same as then—the old afflicted man, and the poor guilty youth—and they were alone together, and *now* for the last time, and earthly

hope was none for either of them. And yet, in that gloomy cell—that portal of the grave, *was* Hope, not born of *this* world, and Peace, such as this world "can neither give nor take away." In the father's heart, a humble and holy confidence, that through Christ's atonement and intercession, the pardon of his repentant child was already registered in Heaven; and in the son's, a more chastised and trembling hope, built up on the same corner-stone, and meekly testified by a perfect submission to his awarded doom, far removed from the miserable triumph of false courage, and the presumptuous confidence of fanatic delusion.

That evening was the close of the last Sabbath Josiah was to pass on earth, and the old man had obtained the mournful privilege of being locked up for the night in the condemned cell. Father and son had that day partaken together of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and when the pious and compassionate chaplain, who had administered that holy rite, looked in upon them before the closing of the prison-doors, they were sitting together upon the low hard pallet, side by side, hand clasped in hand,—and few words passed between

them, for they had spoken all. But the Bible lay open upon the father's knees, and the eyes of both followed the same line, on the same page, as the old man occasionally read in his deep solemn voice, some strengthening and consolatory sentence. The youth's tall slight form was visibly attenuated, and his face was very pale—yet it had regained much of its sweet and youthful expression. The jetty curls of which his father had been so proud, again clustered in glossy richness on his white and polished forehead, and as his head leant against the old man's shoulder, a large tear, which had trembled on the long black fringes of his downcast eyelids, dropt on the sacred page, which assuredly it profaned not. As the good chaplain gazed upon that youthful countenance, his own eyes filled with tears, and he almost groaned within himself, "To be cut off so young!" But repressing that involuntary thought, as one of sinful questioning with Heaven, he addressed to each of his heart-stricken hearers, a few fitting words of comfort and exhortation; and having knelt down with them in short but fervent prayer, and promised to revist them at the earliest hour of admission, he departed for the

night with his Master's emphatic words, "Peace be with you."

The pale cold light of a November dawn yet feebly visited the cell, when Mr. Grey re-entered early on the fatal morning, and all was so still within, he thought *both* slept, the parent and the child. Both had lain down together on the narrow pallet, and the youth's eyes were heavy, and he "slept for sorrow;" but in age, the whole weight falls *within*, and presses not upon the aching eyelids—so the old man slept not. The son's cheek was pillowed on the father's breast, every feature composed in angelic peace, and his slumbers were deep and tranquil as those of infant innocence. One long pale hand was clasped within his father's—in that hard withered hand, which had toiled for him so long—and as the chaplain drew near, and stooped over the bed, the old man, who had been so intently watching his child's placid sleep, as not to heed the opening of the cell, turned his head round with an impatient gesture, as if to prevent the disturbance of that blessed rest. Perhaps *he* also had slumbered for a while, and awaking with that young head upon his bosom, where it

had so often lain in the beauty of childhood, his mind had wandered back confusedly to that blissful season, and its fair vision of parental hope. But one glance round the walls of the small prison room, at the person of the reverend visiter, recalled him to the scene of sad reality, and knowing that the hour was come, he cast upward one earnest look of unutterable supplication, and softly pressing his lips to the forehead of the still unconscious sleeper, thus tenderly awakened him, as he had often done before to light and joy; but *now* to the light of a new day, which for him, whose hours were numbered, was to have no morrow but eternity. And from that hour, till the earthly expiation was complete, Andrew Cleaves left not for one single instant, the side of his unhappy son; and having surely received strength from above, proportioned to his great necessity, not only sustained *himself* firmly throughout the tremendous trial, but soothed and supported the fainting spirit of the poor youth, in his dishonoured passage through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, whispering hope and consolation, even within the portal of that gloomy gate, through which, according to the

course of nature, himself should have gone first. And when all was over, his aged hands helped to compose in its narrow receptacle that youthful form, which should have followed his own remains to a peaceful grave, and laid his grey head reverently in the dust.

Andrew Cleaves had provided that his own cart, with the old favourite horse, should be in readiness at the place of execution, that Gallows-hill at a short distance from C——, where his first outset with the young Josiah had been so ominously impeded. Compunctious bitterness might have sharpened the arrow in his heart, had the absorbing *present* left room for retrospection. But to him, the past, the future, and all extraneous circumstances, were for a time annihilated. In comparatively light affliction, the heart takes strange delight in aggravating its own sufferings, with bitter fancies, and dear remembrances, and dark anticipations; but a mighty grief sufficeth unto itself, in its terrible individuality.

So absorbed, yet acting as if mechanically impelled, while aught remained to do, the old man proceeded with his appointed task, and having, with

the assistance of friendly hands, lifted into the cart the shell containing that poor *all* which now remained to him on earth, he quietly took his seat beside it, while those who had so far lent their charitable aid, prepared to accompany the humble vehicle with its mournful freight, and to lead the old horse—ah! how unconscious of his charge—with slow and respectful pace, to the desolate home of his aged master. Just as the simple arrangement was complete, the old man, whose eyes had not once wandered from the coffin, lifted them for a moment to the face of a woman, who had touched him accidentally, as she stood beside the cart. The sight of that face was like lightning from the past. It flashed through heart and brain, and wakened every nerve that thrilled to torturing memory; and almost he could have cried aloud—"Hast thou found me, oh, mine enemy?" but he refrained himself; and groaning inwardly, let fall his head upon his breast in deep humility. Then slowly lifting it, looked up again into that remembered face, still fixed on him with an expression of unforgetting hardness; and laying his hand upon the coffin, he

said, in a subdued tone, "Woman! pray for me—the time *is* come."

The old man looked up no more, neither spake nor moved, nor betrayed farther signs of consciousness, till the humble car, with its charitable escort, stopt at the gate of his own cottage garden. Then rousing himself to fresh exertion, his first care was to assist in bearing the body of his dead son under the shelter of that roof, beneath which, three-and-twenty years before, he had welcomed him, a new-born babe, and to place the coffin (for he would have it so) on his own bed, in his own chamber. Then lingering for a moment behind those who had helped him to deposit the untimely burden, he drew the white curtain before the little casement, glanced round the chamber as if to ascertain that all was arranged with respectful neatness, and stepping softly, like one who feared to disturb the slumbers of the sick, paused on the threshold to look back for a moment, and making fast the door, as if to secure his treasure, followed his friends into the outer room, and with quiet and collected firmness, rendered to all his grateful acknowledgments for

their charitable services, and set before them such refreshment as his poor means had enabled him to provide.

Neither, while they silently partook round his humble board, did he remit aught of kindly hospitality, nor was it apparently by any painful effort that he so exerted himself. But there was *that* in his countenance and deportment, and in the tone of his low deep voice, which arrested the words of those who would have pressed him to " eat and drink, and be comforted," and carried conviction to the hearts of all, that to *his* affliction *One* only could minister; and that having rendered him all the active service immediately needful, they should best consult his wishes, by leaving him to the unmolested quiet of his solitary cottage. There was a whispering among themselves, as they stood up to depart,—and then a few lowly spoken, but earnest proffers, were made to return at the close of evening; and watch through the hours of darkness, (while the old grey head took rest in sleep,) by him whose slumbers needed no gaurdianship. But the kindly offer was declined with a gentle shake of the head, and a faint smile, which spoke more

meaningly than words—and the old man spoke also, and thanked and blessed them, and bade them take no care for him, for he should "*now* take rest." So they retired—slowly and reluctantly retired—and left him to his coveted solitude.

But there were not wanting some who, deeply moved with compassionate anxiety for the desolate old man, came about the cottage after nightfall, and crept close to its walls with stealthy footsteps. And they told how, looking cautiously into the chamber of death, wherein a light was burning, they saw a sight which so strangely and powerfully affected them, that (rough peasants as they were) they could not afterwards speak of it with unfaltering voices. The coffin, from which the lid had been removed, rested, as they had helped to place it, at the old man's desire, on one half of his own bedstead; and beside it, he had since arranged his mattress and pillow, and then (his head pressing against the coffin, and one arm flung across over its side) he lay at length in sweet and tranquil slumber. He had told them he should "*now* take rest;" and, doubtless, that rest so taken, strange and awful as it was to look upon, was sweet and blessed,

in comparison with all he had lately tasted. For him the bitterness of death was past; and the nearness of his own change made of slight account the little intervening space of earthly darkness. Once more his son lay beside him on that same bed they had so often shared together; and perhaps the moment of reunion with his forgiven child was already anticipated in the dreams of that placid sleep, which composed his venerable features in such unearthly peace.

Four days afterwards, the remains of Josiah Cleaves were quietly and decently interred beside those of his mother in Redburn churchyard. Six labourers, formerly in the employ of Andrew, volunteered to bear the body to its last resting-place; and two or three respectable persons, in decent mourning, walked behind the aged solitary mourner. And beside him none other was akin to the dead, of those who stood that day about that untimely grave in Redburn churchyard; yet was his the only face, which as the affecting service proceeded, maintained unmoved composure, and his the only dry eyes that followed the descent of the

coffin, as it was lowered into "the pit where all things are forgotten."

Andrew Cleaves had unavoidably incurred a few trifling debts during the time of Josiah's imprisonment, and the consequent relaxation of his own laborious industry. To discharge those, and the burial expenses, he parted with his cow, and with his last *freehold*,—that small old pew in the parish church, which had descended to him from his father, the heirloom of many generations, where he himself (a small urchin!) had stood aloft upon the seat between his father and his mother; and when the old couple were laid side by side in the churchyard—where he had sat alone, upright against the high dark oak back, a thriving bachelor, "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," and afterwards, a staid and serious bridegroom, with his matronly bride; and then again, alone in impregnable widowhood; and, last of all, a proud and happy father, with his little son lifted up beside him into the very place where he had stood between his own parents. Andrew Cleaves had said to himself, as he gazed upon the dead body of his

son, that no after circumstance of human life could affect him with the slightest emotion of joy or sorrow; but when he finally made over to another the possession of his old pew, one pang of commingled feeling thrilled through his heart, and moistened the aged eyes that had looked tearlessly into his son's grave.

CHAPTER VI.

The next Sunday after the funeral, Andrew Cleaves was at church as usual, but not in his accustomed place. Many pew-doors opened to him, as he walked slowly and feebly up the aisle, and many a hand was put forth to the old man's arm, essaying to draw him in with kindly violence; but gently disengaging himself, and silently declining the proffered accommodation, he passed onward, and took his seat near the communion-table, on the end of one of the benches appropriated to the parish poor; and from that time forward, to the end of his days, Andrew Cleaves was to be seen twice every Sabbath-day in that same place, more dignified in his sorrow and his humility, and perhaps more inwardly at peace, than he had ever been when the world went well with him, and he counted himself a happy man.

Andrew Cleaves was an old man when his great calamity befell him. He had already numbered seven years beyond the age of man—his threescore years and ten; and though he bore up bravely during the time of trial, that time told afterwards tenfold in the account of Nature, and he sank for a time almost into decrepit feebleness; yet still the lonely creature crept about as usual, and was seen at his daily labour, and at church and market, and answered all greetings and kindly queries, with courteous thankfulness, and assurances that he was well—quite well, and wanted for nothing, and was content to "tarry the Lord's leisure." But it was easy to see he hoped soon to depart, and all who spoke of him said his time would not be long, "for the old man's strength was going." Nevertheless, it was God's pleasure to delay the summons, which could not but have been welcome, though it was awaited with submissive patience. Andrew Cleaves survived his son's death upwards of nine years, and not only did his strong and sound constitution in great measure recover from the shock which for a time had prostrated its uncommon power, but his mind also settled into a state of such perfect peace,

as at times almost brightened into cheerfulness; and never before had he tasted such *pure* enjoyment from the sight of the green earth—of the summer sky, and the sweet influence of the balmy air.

The old man would have been a welcome and respected guest by many a fireside in Redburn village; but at his time of day, it was too late to acquire social habits. It is often easier to break the bondage of a heavy chain, than to disentangle the meshes of a few seemingly slight cords; neither may the tree, which has been warped when a sapling, be made straight when its green branches are all gone, and the bare trunk left scarred and rifted on the heath.

Andrew still dwelt companionless in his paternal cottage, and rarely entered under any other roof, except that of the House of God. But, towards the close of his life, he was more frequently drawn into intercourse with his fellow creatures, than at any former period of his existence. He had continued to support himself, for four years after his son's death, on the sole profits of his garden, and of a little poultry that fed about his cottage; with

which small merchandise he still performed his weekly journey to C—— market. But though the "green old age" of honest Greybeard still yielded good and willing service, it was plain to be seen, that the crazy cart must soon drop to pieces, and many suspected that there was pinching want in Andrew's cottage, in lieu of the increasing comforts which should afford "a good soft pillow for the old grey head." And, thereupon, much kindly consultation took place among the *magnates* of the parish, how to assist and benefit the old man, without wounding his last lurking feeling of human pride—the pride of living by the honest labour of his own hands, unindebted to parochial or individual charity. An opportunity soon presented itself for the furtherance of their benevolent purpose. The foot carrier, who had long travelled twice a-week, to and fro, between C—— and Redburn, became disabled from continuing his office, the acceptance of which was immediately proposed to Andrew Cleaves, and that a new light cart should be provided for him by subscription, among those to whom the regular carriage of packages larger than could be conveyed by a foot carrier, would prove a real ac-

commodation. The old man did not long deliberate. He felt that he could usefully and faithfully acquit himself of the proffered charge, and accepted it with unhesitating gratitude. But when there was farther talk of purchasing for him a younger and more efficient steed than honest Greybeard, Andrew shook his head, in positive rejection, and said, smiling, "No, no, *we* must rub on together—the old fellow will do good service yet; and who knows but he may take *me* to my last home?"—And then, for a moment, his brow darkened with a passing shadow, for the thought of the *last burden* of mortality drawn by the old horse came vividly into his mind.

The new cart was provided, the venerable carrier installed into his office, and for five whole years (his remaining span of life) he fulfilled its duties with characteristic faithfulness and exactitude, and almost with the physical energies of his youthful prime. Winter and summer—through frost and snow—and in the dog-day heat—through fair ways and foul—by daylight and twilight—Andrew Cleaves's cart was to be seen nearly about the same place on Redburn Common, at, or near,

five o'clock, on the afternoon of Tuesdays and Saturdays, on its return from C——. And it was still drawn lustily along by the same old horse, looking sleek and glossy, and round-quartered like one of Wouverman's Flemings; and when some one, willing to please the master, would now and then pat the sides of the faithful creature, and comment on his handsome appearance, the old man would smile with evident gratification, and say—"Ay, ay, I knew what stuff he was made of—*we* shall last out one another's time—never fear."

So said Andrew Cleaves, towards the close of a long, hard winter; when, though the snow-drifts that still lay in every shady place, were not whiter than the once darkly dappled coat of old Greybeard, he shewed little other sign of age, except, indeed, the rather more deliberate pace in which his kind master indulged him. But though the tardy spring set in at last, mild, warm, and beautiful; and though its renovating spirit seemed to infuse itself, like a renewal of youthful vigour, into the frame of the hale and hearty old man, it was observed that his periodical return from C—— became each time later and later; and that, in spite

of the young tender grass on which Greybeard fed at pleasure—and the abundance of bruised corn, and heartening mashes, with which he was tenderly pampered, the sides of the aged creature grew lank and hollow, his fine glossy coat rough and dull, and that his well-set ears, and once erect and sprightly head, drooped low and heavily, as he toiled slowly homeward over the Common.

It was some evening in the first week of balmy June, that an inhabitant of Redburn, who expected a consignment by Andrew's cart, set out to meet the vehicle on its return from C——. The man walked on and on, and no cart was seen approaching, and the gloaming was darkening apace, and still no Andrew.

But just as uncomfortable surmises respecting the delay of the venerable carrier began to crowd into his neighbour's mind, the old man came in sight, not in his accustomed driving-seat, but walking by the side of his aged steed, which still drew on the cart with its lightened load, but evidently with painful labour; and when Andrew stopt to deliver out the required parcel, his neighbour remarked to him, that though he himself looked stout and well

as usual, his good horse seemed drawing near the last of his journeys.

"Maybe—maybe," gravely replied the old man, laying his arm tenderly across the neck of his aged servant, and looking in the creature's face, as it lifted and half turned round its head with seeming consciousness—"Maybe, master! but who knows, after all, which may go first? Please God, we may yet last out one another's time."

But he himself looked well, and strong as ever, and talked cheerfully all the rest of the way; and that same evening, as was customary with him, walked his rounds, to give account of his multifarious commissions. This was on the evening of Saturday, and the next morning Andrew Cleaves was missed at church from his accustomed seat; and no soul that looked towards the vacant place, but knew immediately, that the old man was either sick unto death, or that he had already "fallen asleep in Jesus."

When divine service was over, many persons bent their steps towards the lonely cottage; and soon the general expectation (fear on such an occasion would have been an irreligious feeling) was

fully verified. The cottage door was closed and locked, and not a lattice open, but prompt admission was effected, and there the venerable inmate was found sitting in his old high-backed chair, before the little claw-table, on which was a small glass of untasted ale, and an unlit pipe beside the open Bible. It seemed at a first glance, as if the old man were reading,—but it was not so. One hand, indeed, was still spread upon the chapter before him, but his head had dropt down upon his breast, his eyes were closed, and he slept the last sleep of the righteous.

Such were the village annals collected from different narrators, and at divers opportunities, during the better part of a long summer month, which time I employed, or as some would have it, idled away, in fishing the streams in the vicinity of Redburn, taking up my head-quarters at the sign of the Jolly Miller. The substance of the story, and all its main facts, were, however, related to me by the loquacious landlady, on the first night of my sojourn under her roof. And she wound up her narrative with farther particulars, including the ghost, which

had excited such extraordinary tumult in the hitherto quiet village.

Andrew Cleaves had been laid at rest beside the graves of his wife and son, the day before my arrival. The burial charges were defrayed by the sale of that poor remnant of his household goods which yet remained in the cottage, its once abundant plenishing having gone piece by piece during the time of his greatest necessity. The old cottage itself, and its small domain, fell in, of course, to its reversionary purchaser, the village butcher. And there was no man to say him nay, when he likewise appropriated to himself, as make-weights no doubt in the scale of the dilapidated building—its few living appurtenances,—Andrew's favourite breed of milk-white poultry, and his only, his still surviving servant, honest Greybeard. Yes, the poor old creature, fast drooping as he was, did indeed *last out his master's time*, and render him the latest service. For the old man was taken to his grave in his own cart, by his own aged servant; and that was the last task of the poor worn-out brute; and when it was over, his new proprietor turned him loose at the churchyard gate into his

own adjoining field, there to linger out the few intervening days, till that when he was destined to furnish a repast to the squire's hounds.

The graves of the Cleaveses lay side by side under the churchyard wall, at that end of the cemetery exactly fronting the entrance. The old man had been committed to the earth on the fourth day from that of his decease; and, some hours after the funeral, a person came hurrying about nightfall into the tap-room of the Jolly Miller, affirming, that in his way past the churchyard, having looked accidentally towards the new-made grave, at its farther extremity, he had seen distinctly a white spectral shape arise out of the earth, at the head of the dark fresh mound, which strange appearance gradually increased in size and stature, till he was afraid to continue gazing, and ran off to communicate the awful intelligence.

Some laughed at Hodge's story, some bullied, some quaked; but all clamoured and questioned, and finished by running off *en masse* towards the churchyard, headed by the bearer of wonderful tidings, whose courage being of a gregarious nature, became absolute valour with such comfortable

backing. Yet did *his* pace slacken perceptibly as he approached the burial-ground, and his followers pressed less impatiently upon his heels; and the whole phalanx, by that time wedged into close order, retrograded simultaneously, when Hodge stopped short with a theatrical start, and stretching forth his right arm, after the fashion of the Prince of Denmark, uttered not exactly the adjuration of the royal Dane, but an exclamation quite as electric to his excited followers.

"There he goes, by Gosh!" quoth Hodge, under his breath.

But all heard the awful words; and all were ready to make oath, that just as they were spoken, they saw something tall, white, vapoury, spectral, sink down into the earth at the head of Andrew Cleaves's grave. Some went so far as to whisper of having caught a glimpse of horns and fiery eyes; and they might have got on to hoofs and a long tail, had not the less imaginative elders rebuked such idle fantasies, and condemned the uncharitable inferences therefrom deducible.

"For why should the Evil One, designated by their fears, be permitted to visit the last earthly

resting-place of one, whose faith, while living, had baffled his subtlest wiles, and whose immortal part was now, it was humbly to be hoped, beyond the influence of his power?"

But *they*, too—those sober witnesses—had seen *something*—had caught a momentary glance of the white figure as it sank into the earth! and their long-drawn jaws, and solemn doubts, and qualified admission, and pious ejaculations, struck more awe to the hearts of the cowering group than the bolder asseverations of the first speakers. Certain it is, not one of the party proposed to enter the consecrated precincts, and take closer cognizance of the spot, to which all eyes were directed with intense eagerness. But they kept their ground of observation for a considerable time after the vanishing of the phantom; and though mysterious sounds and indistinct glimmerings were still rife in the heated imaginings of many, no further *appearance* was unanimously pronounced to have been visible during that night's watch, and, by degrees, the gazers dispersed, to spread panic and conjecture through the village. No epidemic is more easily disseminated; and, by the next days close, *all* Redburn

mustered for the ghost-hunt;—which formidable array it was my lot to encounter, when I first entered the straggling street, in quest of lodging and entertainment at the village inn. More entertainment than I had reckoned on was, as I have shown, provided for me by my garrulous landlady; and her village gossip had so well eked out the more substantial refreshment of her savoury fare, that time had stolen on unheeded amidst the unwonted quiet of her well-frequented house, and darkness had long succeeded the gloaming which lent me light to reach its hospitable shelter. And still the old lady had something more to tell, and I still listened with unwearied ear, when all at once the deep, unnatural quiet of "the deserted village" was broken by a confused uproar, like the rushing of an approaching torrent, and in a moment, the trampling of many feet, and the clattering of many tongues, announced the nearness of the living *torrent*, which came pouring onward in "admired disorder," and pressing head over head, and shoulder against shoulder, into the kitchen of the Jolly Miller. And there were white faces, and staring eyes, and chattering teeth, and "horrific

hair," but no paralysis of tongues; and, for a while, the confusion of Babel was nothing to that which mingled forty discordant voices, all trying to out-pitch one another.

At length, however, I obtained from mine host himself the sum and substance of the *united discords*. His *professional* eye had been acute, even in the midst of the hurlyburly, to discern that a new and respectable-looking guest was located in his house; and I was accordingly favoured with his account of the recent adventure.

They had watched, he said, two good hours at the churchyard hatch, in full view of Andrew Cleaves's grave, the exact spot of which was discernible, even after perfect nightfall. And they had taken every possible precaution to satisfy themselves before dark that no living creature, Christian or brute, was lurking within the churchyard,—that there was nothing within it but the green graves, and the white tombstones, and the old yew tree in the north-east angle.

"Well, sir," said mine host, "we watched there, as I made mention, two mortal hours; and though some fancied one thing, and some another,

they were nothing but fancies,—for nothing better nor worse than we ourselves was stirring all that time; and I for one began to think we were making fools of ourselves, and had best sneak home quietly, and say nothing more about the matter. But just then, sir," quavered mine host, glancing fearfully round, and lowering his tone to a whisper, "just then, sir! We *did* see something. We *seed* the tall, white thing rise up out of the earth, right at the head of the old man's grave; and then, sir, if you'll believe me, as I am a sinful man, it rose and rose, and spread, till it was as big and high as the gas-work tower—though, for shape, we could not make it much out,—only the head of it seemed to shoot up in a kind of forked fashion; and there must have been some sort of unnatural light about it, for my eyes got quite dazed and dizzy like, and there was a ringing in my ears; and then—Lord, sir!—while we were all looking quite steadfast, and standing as steady as a rock, sir!—quite cool and composed—the thing gives a kind of a heave up—so, sir!—and down again; and then there was a terrible noise, just as if the old church tower was tumbling about our ears,—

and then, we thought, it would be presumptuous to stay any longer, (for rashness is not courage you know, sir,) and so we came back home again, sir, to talk the matter over quietly."

But neither mine host nor his adherents were in a state to talk the matter over very quietly just then; and all shrank back with unequivocal dismay, when I proposed to head them for a fresh enterprise,—myself and two or three others provided with lanterns, not to flare about the outskirts of the burying ground, but to make strict search within its haunted precincts—even upon the very grave itself—of which they could not hear without a shudder. By degress, however,—what with shaming their pusillanimity, and patting their courage, and plying them well with mine host's strong beer,—I succeeded in enlisting a band of desperate heroes, prepared to brave all dangers, and swearing to go with me through fire and water. And off we set, at a good round pace, (for some sort of courage is apt to cool if it marches to slow time,) and so reached the churchyard hatch; and dashing through, without a moment's pause, made straight towards the haunted grave. But when we had

neared it by a few yards, my doughty heroes made a sudden stop; and I held out my lantern far and high, to throw forward its rays on the strange object which indisputably lay (a long, white heap) on Andrew's grave. Just then I struck my foot against a stone; and one behind me stumbled over another great rough stone, like those piled together, without masonry, that formed the churchyard wall, close to which lay the three graves of the Cleaveses.

"Oh, ho!" I cheeringly cried out to my trembling followers, "here has been a downfal; but ghosts do not break down stone walls, my men." And on we went, stumbling over like obstacles, and five steps more brought us to the place of terrors; and all the lanterns were held out, every neck poked forward, every eye full stretched,—and all fear soon exchanged for loquacious wonder, and pitying exclamation,—for there, upon his master's grave, stretched out at full length upon its side, lay the skeleton carcass of Andrew's poor old horse. He had been turned into the butcher's field behind the churchyard, to await, as I have told, the leisure of the squire's hounds. There was a breach in the loose-stone wall, exactly at the head

of Andrew's grave; and whether it was simply impatience of his new pasture, or whether the creature was really conscious that to the spot below that broken wall, he had drawn the remains of his old master, certain it is, he must have stationed himself in the gap when first observed by the frightened villagers; and no doubt might have been seen there by daylight, had any one then bethought himself of looking *beyond the grave* toward the adjoining enclosure. And it is equally certain, that on the memorable night of the catastrophe, the poor old animal having raised himself by his forelegs on the lowest part of the breach, the loose stones had given way under his hoofs, and falling forward with them, a helpless, heavy weight, he had breathed out the last feeble remnant of his almost extinguished life, on the scarcely closed grave of his aged master, whose words were verified almost to the letter—"We shall last out one another's time."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GRAVE OF THE BROKEN HEART.

WITHIN a quarter of a mile of one of the most secluded sea-side hamlets on our western coast, stands its parish-church, a picturesque old building, on a most romantic site—the brow of a richly wooded cliff—the burial-ground forming a sort of table-land of rich sheltered verdure, surrounded by noble elms, through the boles of which one may look down on the rolling ocean, so majestically contrasting with its ever restless billows, the unbroken silence and undisturbed tranquillity which reign within that village of the dead. I visited the church and churchyard about sunset on a rich autumnal evening, when the very soul of repose and harmony, pervading earth, air, and sky, seemed to breathe over the holy ground a more holy conse-

cration. There was not a cloud in heaven—not even one purple cloud in the whole flaming occident, where the great glorious orb was slowly sinking into the waveless sea, whose mighty voice was hushed into a lulling and delicious murmur, as the long liquid ridges advanced and receded with caressing gentleness on the broad silver sands. As I entered the lofty burying-ground, its western screen of noble elms stood magnificently dark, in undefined massiness, between me and the glowing sunset; but the golden glory stole in long lines of light through the arches of that living colonnade, burnishing the edges of many a tombstone, its quaint tracery of cross-bones, skull, and hour-glass, and brightening many a nameless turfen heap, as if typical of the robes of light reserved in heaven, even for the lowly righteous, who have passed away from earth unhonoured and unknown.

The church itself stood in deep shadow, except that here and there a glittering beam darting through some chink in the dark foliage, kindled the diamond panes of a long narrow window, or gilded the edge of an abutment, or the inner groining of the fine old porch, and on one particular spot, (a

thickly ivied gable,) one golden ray streamed like an index, immediately attracting my attention to the object on which it centred, a small oval monumental tablet, wholly unornamented, but well-proportioned, of the purest white marble, and to my taste strikingly elegant, from that extreme simplicity, and the singularly beautiful effect of contrast, afforded by its rich frame-work of dark green ivy. Of the latter, not a vagrant tendril had been suffered to encroach over the edge of the small tablet, which had been affixed to the wall through a space just cleared to receive it in the verdant arras; and I found, on a nearer scrutiny, that little more than a twelvemonth had elapsed since the insertion of that monumental record. The inscription was still sharp and clear, as if fresh from the chisel, and its purport was framed thus remarkably :—

TO THE MEMORY OF
MILLICENT ABOYNE,
DAUGHTER AND ONLY CHILD OF THE BRAVE
COLONEL ABOYNE,
THIS TABLET IS INSCRIBED BY HER FAITHFUL SERVANT.
SHE DIED AUGUST 10TH, 1——,
IN THE 30TH YEAR OF HER AGE,
OF A BROKEN HEART.

I cannot tell how long I had been gazing on that strangely touching record, when the sound of an approaching footstep caused me to look round, and I saw advancing towards me an old grey-headed man, bearing in one hand a bunch of ponderous keys, his insignia of office, for he was no other than the parish-clerk, who, from his cottage window, which opened into the churchyard, having observed the entrance of a stranger within its sacred precincts, and the apparent interest and curiosity with which I had been surveying the exterior of the church, came courteously forward, (doubtless not without some latent view to "a *consideration*,") proffering admittance to the interior of the venerable edifice, and his services as Cicerone; and a far more agreeable one he proved than many a pompous guardian of more magnificent temples; and far more pleasingly and profitably I spent that evening hour, within the comparatively humble walls of the village church, listening to the simple annals of that aged chronicler, than I have passed various portions of time among the proud tombs of the mighty dead, rich in the splendour of architectural ornament and imperishable memories, over

which all the yearnings of the heart to meditate in solemn silence are effectually marred, by the intrusive chatter of the magpie hireling who follows from tomb to tomb—from chapel to chapel, with voluble impertinence.

My rustic Cicerone was very differently qualified; and, as he told me, in brief and simple phrase, the history of the few monuments—of some from personal recollection of the individuals to whose memories they were inscribed—each story acquired additional interest from the venerable aspect of the aged historian, on whose bald uncovered head, thinly encircled by a few white silky locks, the sunbeams darting through some panes of amber-tinted glass in the great west window, shed a halo of golden glory. The deep shadows of evening had almost blended into profound obscurity, ere I left the church, and bade farewell to my venerable guide; but from him I did not separate, ere I had in some degree satisfied my curiosity respecting that small tablet on the ivy wall, on which I was gazing so intently when he courteously accosted me. The old man shook his head in reply to my

first query and accompanying remark on the singularity of the inscription.

"Ah, sir!" said he, "that was a sad business—I am afraid some folks have much to answer for. But God only knows all hearts." And then he told me just so much of the story of that poor lady, whose fate was so affectingly recorded, as served to enhance my pleasure at hearing that I might obtain the full gratification of my curiosity, by introducing myself to the faithful old servant who had caused the erection of that singular memorial, who still lingered in the vicinity of a spot to her so sacred, and was never so happy as when encouraged by some attentive and sympathizing hearer, to talk of "days langsyne;"—of the departed glory of her master's house; and above all, of that beloved being, whose motherless infancy she had fostered with all the doting fondness of an Irish nurse, and whose fortunes she had followed through good and through evil, even unto the death, with that devoted attachment so characteristic of her class and country.

That very evening, the sweet hour of gloaming, witnessed the beginning of my acquaintance with

Nora Carthy, and two hours later, when the uprisen moon showered down its full radiance on the jasmine-covered walls of her low white cottage, I was sitting with my new friend on the bench beside her own door, still listening with unflagging interest to her "thick-coming" recollections, and even to the fondly unconscious repetitions poured out from the fulness of long pent-up feelings.

Many were the after visits I paid to Nora's cottage, and more than once I stood beside the faithful creature on the churchyard sod, under that small marble tablet in the ivy wall; and I shall not easily forget the speechless intensity with which she gazed upon its affecting record, nor the after burst of bitter feeling, when pointing to the green grave beneath, she passionately exclaimed—"And there she lies low—the flower of the world!—laid there by a broken heart!"

I would not venture to relate the somewhat uneventful, but not uninteresting story of Millicent Aboyne, exactly as I heard it from the faithful Nora, whose characteristic enthusiasm, and strong prejudices, combined with her devoted affection for the deceased lady, made it almost impossible that

she should afford a fair statement of the painful circumstances, which, in her firm opinion, had consigned the unfortunate Miss Aboyne to an untimely grave. But I had opportunities of comparing poor Nora's relation with information derived from less questionable sources, and so gathered together, with impartial selection, the details which I shall now attempt to arrange, in memory of my visit to Sea Vale Churchyard.

The father of Millicent Aboyne was a descendant of one of the most ancient Milesian families, whose genealogy, had I listened to Nora, I might have given in uninterrupted succession from Brian Boru. But if the royal blood had flowed uncontaminated from generation to generation into the veins of late posterity, a very inconsiderable portion of the royal treasure had been transmitted along with it, and Colonel Aboyne, the last lineal descendant, had still to carve out his fortune with his sword, when the French Revolution dissolved the Irish Brigade in the service of France, as an officer of which corps, and a most accomplished gentleman, he had already been flatteringly distinguished at the Court of the Tuileries.

To Ireland, where the young soldier still possessed a few acres of bog, and the shell of an old tower—the wreck of bygone prosperity—he betook himself on the first overthrow of his Gallic fortunes, with the intention of resuming his military career, as soon as circumstances should permit, in the English service. But a chain of causes, which I shall not take upon me to detail, combined to procrastinate the execution of this purpose, and, at length, so fatally influenced the enthusiastic and high-spirited character of the young soldier, that, without having calculated the consequences of his unguarded zeal in what he considered the cause of the oppressed—far less having contemplated actual rebellion—he found himself deeply involved in the schemes of desperate men, and, finally, sharing with them the penalties of imprisonment, and probably approaching condemnation. The horrors of his fate were bitterly aggravated by anxiety for a beloved wife, to whom he had been lately united, whose very existence seemed bound up with his own—for he had married her a destitute and friendless English orphan—a stranger in a strange land —affectingly cast upon his compassionate protec-

tion, in her hour of extreme necessity. For her sake, life was precious to him on any terms not incompatible with a soldier's honour; and he ventured on a plan of escape so hazardous, that none but desperate circumstances could have made it other than an act of madness. It fatally miscarried—for in the act of lowering himself from a wall of immense height, the frail cord to which he trusted failed him, and he was precipitated to the ground—retaken—and re-conveyed to his dungeon with a fractured arm and thigh, and such other material injuries, as made it more than doubtful whether his life would be prolonged to pay the probably impending forfeiture. He was, however, spared by divine mercy, and by judicial lenity.

Colonel Aboyne was proved to have been almost unwittingly involved in the guilt of great offenders, from whom Justice having exacted the dread penalty, was content to relax from her rigorous demands, in favour of the comparatively innocent; and the almost hopeless prisoner was restored to liberty, and to his young, devoted wife, too blest to receive him back, as it were from the confines of the grave, though he returned to her, and to

their ruinous home—the wreck—the shadow of his former self, with a frame and constitution irreparably injured by the fatal consequences of his late enterprise. The heavy charges of his trial had compelled him to mortgage his small patrimony, on which (thus burdened) it became impossible for him to maintain even his moderate establishment. Ireland was become distasteful to him; and the languishing health of Mrs. Aboyne requiring a milder climate than that of their northern residence, he lent a not unwilling ear to her timidly expressed longing once more to breathe the balmy air of her native Devonshire; and disposing (not without a pang) of Castle Aboyne, and every rood of his diminished heritage, with the small sum thus realized he departed for England; and with his gentle wife, and two faithful servants—Nora Carthy and her husband—was shortly established in a small dwelling at Sidmouth.

More than one season of pensive tranquillity rather than of positive happiness, was permitted them in that beautiful retreat; but the fatal blow had been long struck to the heart of Mrs. Aboyne, and her life, though sinking by almost imperceptible

tible degrees, was not to be prolonged beyond the sixth summer of their residence in England. During that interval she had given birth to two children. One only, a little girl, in her fifth year, survived her mother, to be the comfort of her afflicted father, and, as she grew up, the support and blessing of his infirm and solitary state. The faithful Nora had lost her only child about the time of the young Millicent's birth, and she had taken the latter to her bosom, with all the tenderness of a mother, Mrs. Aboyne being unable to nurse her own infant.

Nora was widowed also, before her mistress's death, so that her whole stock of warm affections centred in her orphan nursling, and in the master, whose fortunes she had followed through good and through evil.

The residence of Sidmouth becoming distasteful to Colonel Aboyne, after the death of his beloved companion, he removed, with his little family, to a more secluded spot on the same western coast, the obscure village of Sea Vale, where motives of economy, as well as choice, induced him finally to fix his permanent abode.

Uneventful, but not unblessed, flowed on the existence of the inmates of Sea Vale Cottage, till the young Millicent was grown up into womanhood; in the opinion of her doting father, as fair and perfect a creature as was ever formed in the imperfection of mortal nature, and in that of Nora Carthy, something still more faultless—an earthly angel!—the object of her idol worship, though the warm-hearted Irishwoman, having been brought up by her mistress, Colonel Aboyne's mother, in the Protestant communion, professed to abjure all Popish abominations.

It should have been mentioned earlier in this little narrative, that the parents of Colonel Aboyne were of a divided faith, and that he himself—though educated in his father's tenets—those of the Roman Catholic Church—had received from his mother's early example, and restricted influence, such a bias in favour of the Reformed Religion, as, in after time, when he became the inhabitant of a Protestant country, the husband of a wife of that persuasion, matured into sincere belief in that faith which had been *her* support in the hour of death, and, amid the pangs of separation, the mu-

tual pledge of future reunion. It is almost needless to add, that the little Millicent was brought up in the belief which had become that of both her parents; but the circumstances of Colonel Aboyne had precluded all possibility of giving her any other advantages of education, beyond those in his own power to impart. Happily his capabilities of tuition extended to the conferring of every thing really valuable, and even beyond those attainments, to many of the ornamental acquirements, which, like the capital of a Corinthian pillar, so gracefully surmount the more solid substructure.

The mind of Millicent Aboyne was, therefore, not only stored with sacred knowledge and useful information, but she could read Italian and French with perfect facility, drew landscapes and flowers with more taste and truth than is ever evinced by half the spoilt children of fortune, on whom vast sums have been lavished, to entitle them to daub hot-pressed card-board with likenesses of things that never existed in "heaven above or in the earth beneath," and even acquired so much skill in instrumental music, (to accompany a naturally sweet and flexible voice,) as could be taught by

her father's crippled hand on an old Spanish guitar, the cords of which he had touched in his youth with such perfect execution, as, in unison with vocal powers of uncommon richness, had won for the gay and handsome soldier, many a sweet smile and admiring glance, from the circle of court beauties, of which Marie Antoinette was the eclipsing cynosure. Many a ear which shrinks fatigued and unedified from astounding *bravuras*, and scientific *hors d'œuvres*, running matches against time with scampering accompaniments on grand pianos, might have drank in delightedly the sweet and perfect melody of two blended voices, harmonising with now and then a harp-like chord, which often sounded at nightfall, from within the small low parlour of Sea Vale Cottage, or from the honeysuckle arbour in its little garden, when the warm summer evenings drew thither the father and his child, with the tea-table, and Millicent's work-basket, the Colonel's old guitar, and his still treasured "cahier de romances nouvelles imprimées à Paris l'an mil-sept cents quatrevingt douze." But though this venerable récueil was prized by Colonel Aboyne as a relic of the pleasurable days of

youthful vanity—when hope was high, and "the world all before him where to choose"—and though visions of "long-faded glories" passed before his eyes, as they dwelt on the familiar music, and he hummed unconsciously the old favourite airs, he took far deeper delight in teaching Millicent the songs of his own native land, and in mingling his voice with hers, in those wild and thrilling harmonies. In one of those—the touching Gramachree—the united strains were sweetly swelling, when late in the twilight of a summer evening a solitary stranger strolled down the shady green lane which bounded Colonel Aboyne's garden, and passed close behind the honeysuckle arbour. It was not in nature—not in that stranger's nature—to pass onward unheedful of those melodious sounds which poured forth so unexpectedly as it were in his very path; and there he lingered (for strain succeeded strain) till the bright moon climbed high in heaven, and the unseen harmonists, desisting from their vocal labours, began to converse with each other in such sweet tones of affectionate familiarity, as would have riveted the listener's attention even more forcibly than the preceding

music, had he not started away from even a momentary indulgence of dishonourable curiosity. His forbearance was not unaccompanied, however, by views of ultimate compensation; and no later than the following morning, the village doctor, a worthy and sensible man, ever a welcome visitant at Sea Vale Cottage, was accompanied, in his early visit to its inmates, by a stranger of prepossessing appearance, whom he introduced to Colonel and Miss Aboyne as the Rev. Mr. Vernon, the new curate of Sea Vale.

Horace Vernon was one of many children, the orphans of a deceased clergyman; and his widowed mother had strained her overburdened means to the very uttermost, to continue him at the University for two years after his father's sudden and untimely death.

Beyond that important period she was powerless to assist him; and when he was so fortunate as to obtain the desirable curacy of Sea Vale on entering into holy orders, her maternal anxieties, so far relieved on his account, were naturally engrossed by the more pressing claims of her younger children. Horace was well content with his allotted

station. From his earliest recollection, accustomed to retirement, and to the strict though respectable frugality of his father's household, and subjected, during the greater part of his college life, to the innumerable privations and mortifications inseparable from the station of a poor scholar among the wealthy and the prodigal, he had acquired no habits or ideas inimical to the life of obscure usefulness apparently designed for him. There had never been any rational prospect of his obtaining church preferment, unless he should fag his way up the clerical ladder, by college tutorship, or private connexions otherwise formed at the University; and this course he might have pursued successfully, had his father lived to continue him at college, and to excite him to the necessary exertions. But his was not an energetic character. It was amiable, affectionate, and feeling—endowed with no inconsiderable share of talent, much refined and elegant taste, and a sincere desire of acting up to every moral and religious principle. Add to this a very handsome person and engaging address, a little leaven of vanity, and a too great liability to be influenced, even against his better judgment, by the

graceful and showy, in opposition to more solid but less attractive qualities, and the sketch of Horace Vernon's character will be faithful as a mere outline. This little history affords no scope for Flemish painting.

So constituted and endowed, the young curate settled himself very contentedly at Sea Vale, and was not long in making a most favourable impression on all classes throughout the parish. He was unaffectedly earnest in his pulpit duties, and not less anxious to fulfil all others annexed to his pastoral charge. And he did fulfil them very respectably, and so as to give almost general satisfaction; though, it must be confessed, not without occasionally yielding, and often doing violence, to certain feelings of morbid refinement, which revolted with sickening disgust from many of those scenes of human misery which must come under the eye of the zealous minister, and from which the faithful follower of Him who "went about doing good," will not shrink back with fastidious weakness.

Exactly twelve months from that sweeet summer evening when Horace Vernon was arrested, in his first stroll round the village thenceforth to be his

home, by the plaintive air, of "Gramachree," breathed in vocal unison from behind the high holly-hedge which separated him from Colonel Aboyne's garden,—exactly a twelvemonth from that well-remembered evening, the young curate was seated in the arbour *within* that holly-hedge, and *his* voice, in lieu of her father's, was mingling with that of Millicent Aboyne in the same touching harmony, while her hand lightly swept the chords of the old guitar; and Colonel Aboyne, reclining comfortably in his large arm-chair, the "cahier de romances nouvelles" lying on his cushioned footstool, gazed with tender complacency on the twain, thenceforth to be inseparably united in his affections,—for his Millicent was the affianced wife of Horace Vernon.

Such had been the very natural, the almost inevitable, result of an acquaintance and intimacy formed between two amiable and attractive young persons, brought perpetually together under such circumstances as characterized the intercourse of Horace Vernon and Millicent Aboyne. Had they become acquainted in the concourse of the world, or even been thrown together in a circle rather more diversified than that small group which con-

stituted their world at Sea Vale, it is possible, nay, even probable, that neither would have conceived for the other a warmer sentiment than kindness and friendly interest, for in many points they differed essentially; and Millicent, more than two years older than Vernon, gentle and serious almost to pensiveness, elegant and pleasing in person rather than strikingly beautiful, and characterized by peculiar diffidence and simplicity of manner, would hardly have been distinguished among the more youthful, the more brilliant, the more showily accomplished, by one so peculiarly liable as was Horace Vernon to be captivated by those graces which excite most general admiration.

But he had never mixed in general society;—had never, in the small circle of his connexions and acquaintance, seen any thing half so fair, so elegant and attractive, as the sweet Millicent. The high-bred manners of Colonel Aboyne were also delightful to his really refined taste; and the kind hospitality with which he was ever welcomed at Sea Vale Cottage, won on his best affections, while the tastes and pursuits of its inmates awakened his warmest sympathies. No wonder that, under such

circumstances, Horace should attach himself devotedly to Miss Aboyne, nor that she, whose intercourse with the world had been even more limited than her lover's, should return his affection with the warmth and truth of a first and perfect tenderness, without questioning with herself, whether the amiable and engaging qualities which had won her unpractised heart, were built upon that stable groundwork which formed the basis of her own gentle and diffident character. Essentially requisite it was to the present peace and future happiness of Horace and Millicent, that the virtues of patience and stability should be among their leading characteristics,—for prudence, or rather necessity, deferred to a distant period their hope of being united.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was not indeed till the twelfth month of their acquaintance that Vernon had ventured to declare to Colonel Aboyne his attachment to his daughter, and to ask his parental sanction to their future union. To this step he had been emboldened by the promise of a small living from an old friend and college pupil of his deceased father; and the present incumbent being far advanced in years, there was a rational prospect of Vernon's becoming, at no remote period, master of such a moderate competence as might enable him to marry, without subjecting the object of his affections to the miseries of genteel poverty.

Colonel Aboyne, who had become warmly attached to Horace, was well content to accept his proposals for that darling daughter, the thought of whose friendless and well nigh destitute condition,

in the event of her becoming an orphan, not only banished sleep too often from his pillow, but wrapt him in many a fit of deep and sad abstraction, while listening—apparently listening—to the sweet music of her silvery voice, or sitting with her at the social board, where she "gaily prest and smiled," unconscious of the feelings she inspired. His consent was therefore cordially and joyfully yielded; and to Horace and Millicent, the state of sanctioned and untroubled happiness which succeeded their betrothment, seemed for a time so near the perfection of earthly felicity, that even he (the more impassioned, but not more devoted, of the twain) contemplated, with tolerable equanimity, the possible intervention of the two or three years (a very reasonable allowance of life to the old incumbent) between his present condition of probationary bliss, and the union which was to render it complete. Almost domesticated with Colonel Aboyne and his daughter, to the former he looked up with filial affection and respect; and his more tender and intimate association with Millicent's finely-constituted mind, insensibly led to the happiest results in his own character, which gradually

settled into a steadiness of pursuit and principle well befitting his sacred profession, and holding out the fairest promise of wedded happiness to his affianced wife, who already went hand in hand with her destined partner in all the sweet and holy charities constituting so essential a portion of pastoral duty. Never, perhaps, (allowing for the alloy which must temper all earthly happiness,) were assembled happier persons than the three sitting together, as lately described, under the honeysuckle arbour in Colonel Aboyne's garden, in the warm twilight of that sweet summer evening.

Horace and Millicent had returned from a long ramble, and many benevolent visits among the more distant cottagers of their extensive parish. They had felt that "where the eye saw, it blessed them;" and the tender and serious heart of Millicent, in particular, overflowed with that blissful conviction, and with the delightful assurance, that her *heavenly*, as well as her *earthly* parent, did indeed sanction her intended union, and that her lot, and that of her chosen partner, cast as it was in the quiet vale of sweet retirement and safe mediocrity, where, nevertheless, opportunities of doing

good would be abundantly afforded, was one so peculiarly favoured, that while she thought thereon tears swelled into her dove-like eyes, and she faltered out something of her feelings (for what tongue could speak them fluently?) to him on whose arm she leant in tender and perfect confidence. So time passed on with the betrothed lovers, accompanied in its progress by all of pleasantness and enjoyment that could compensate for protracted expectation. And on, and on it passed —still pleasantly—still happily, on the whole, but to a length of probation so little anticipated by Vernon—so unchangeable as to any immediate prospect of termination, that something of the sickness of hope deferred began to steal into his heart, and now and then betrayed itself, even to Millicent, by a fretful tone or word, or a look of languor and sullenness, even in the midst of occupations and interests, which to *her* had lost nothing of their soothing and salutary influence.

A year—two—three—four years (in truth, an awful amount in the sum of human life!) passed on, at first swiftly and happily, then with more tedious pace, and at last heavily, and sometimes sadly, at

Sea Vale Cottage. Still existing circumstances were precisely the same with all parties, as when, four summers back, they felt themselves the happiest and most contented of human beings. But as years crept on with Colonel Aboyne, his anxiety to see his child securely established became naturally greater, and he could not but occasionally observe and lament that though Vernon's attachment to Millicent suffered no apparent diminution, feelings of despondency and irritability were growing fast upon his character, where they might acquire a fatal influence, not to be counteracted hereafter by the tardy operation of happier circumstances. And Millicent! she was too well aware, even more so than her father, of the morbid change which was effecting in her lover's mind, composed as it was by nature of gay and happy elements. Poor Millicent! —how many thorns had already sprung up in that peaceful path, which but so lately she had accounted peculiarly favoured! Vernon's affection for her, though less ardently demonstrated than when they first exchanged their plighted troth, she verily believed to be entire and sincere as in those halcyon days; and her feelings towards him had but ma-

tured into deeper and more holy tenderness—entire and self-devoting, such as only woman's heart can cherish—not blind to the imperfections of the beloved object, though sweetly extenuating and excusing them, with unconscious ingenuity. Miss Abyone could not but observe, also, that the broad open brow of her dear father was more frequently contracted with deep and open lines than she had ever yet seen imprinted there—and she fancied too (it *might* be *only* fancy) that there was a perceptible change in his whole person and deportment, as if Time were hurrying him on with more hasty strides than the imperceptibly downward pace of natural decline.

Millicent's tender apprehensions were not wholly groundless; Colonel Abyone's constitution, impaired by former severe suffering, had of late felt the pernicious influence of increased mental disquietude, and again, the physical ailment, reacting on the moral, brought on a train of those nervous miseries, scarcely to be repelled by any effort of reason and self-control, even when perfectly imaginary; and unhappily there was too much reason for Colonel Aboyne's uneasiness. He persuaded

himself the hour was fast approaching which would make his daughter not only a friendless, but almost a destitute orphan, her sole inheritance comprising the small cottage they inhabited, and a sum of money scarce amounting to hundreds, though the accumulated whole of his small annual savings, religiously hoarded, with whatever sacrifice of his own comforts, since the hour of his darling's birth. The circumstances of her engagement to Horace Vernon were such as would also render her situation one of greater difficulty, if the period was still to be deferred when she might be taken from a father's to a husband's home; and while revolving all these perplexities in his sleepless and solitary hours, Colonel Aboyne was almost inclined to yield to the frequently impatient proposals of Horace for his immediate union with Millicent; and that, leaving fearlessly to Providence all care for the future, they might form, for the present, one humble and contented family, under the peaceful roof of Sea Vale Cottage. But Colonel Aboyne was too well aware of the distresses which might tread close on such a measure to sanction it, except as one of imperious necessity; and at length, after long and

harassing reflection, he determined on the execution of a project, to which nothing less than overpowering anxiety for his beloved child could have reconciled his high spirit and fastidious feelings. It was no less an enterprise (great indeed to the long-secluded valetudinarian) than to revisit the land of his birth—the home of his forefathers, in the forlorn hope of recovering from a distant kinsman the amount of a pecuniary loan, lent, in the generous confidence of unsuspicious youth, without further security than the word of a friend, which sacred pledge had not however been redeemed, on Colonel Aboyne's written application, soon after his first establishment in England; and, high-spirited as he was, no personal consideration could have compelled a second remonstrance. But for his child!—his child!—what sacrifice would he not make! what difficulties would he not encounter! His resolve was made, declared, and speedily acted upon, in spite of the tender dissuasions of Millicent, and the fainter opposition of Vernon. New vigour seemed granted to him for the prosecution of his arduous undertaking; and cheerfully reassuring his anxious and drooping child, he firmly negatived

her tender petition to accompany him to Ireland, on the reasonable grounds that it would not only increase their embarrassments if he failed in the object of his expedition, but at all events, protract his absence from Sea Vale.

The day was fixed for Colonel Aboyne's departure, and the preceding evening was the saddest ever spent together by the father and daughter in that dear cottage, which had been so long the scene of their domestic happiness. Autumn was somewhat advanced, but the glorious light of a cloudless harvest-moon shone full into the little parlour casement, near which sat together the parent and the child, side by side, her hand within her father's,—and they were both silent. Only, when Colonel Aboyne fondly kissed the pale soft cheek which rested on his shoulder, and the full closed eyelids, with their long lashes trembling through tears in the moon-beam, poor Millicent turned her face inward on her father's bosom, and the suppressed grief half-vented itself in deep short sobs.

"Be of good comfort, dearest!" said her father, mastering his own emotion—"Cheer up, my Milly! Remember I am going to leave you but for a short—

a very short time. You and I have spoiled each other, Milly! We have been too much together; I should have sent my darling sometimes away from me, to have accustomed her to live without her old father —and there is *one,* Milly! who, if I were gone"—but poor Milly's thick-coming sobs told him those were not words of comfort—and after a minute's silence, to calm the tremor in his own voice, he resumed in freer accents. "Look up, Milly! at that bright, full moon—before it is dwindled to a silver thread, you may hear that I am on my way home again; and—look up, Milly! and see how gloriously it shines upon us—we will for once believe in omens, and take its bright promise for"——Millicent looked up just as her father stopt so abruptly—a huge black bar was drawn across the star of promise; and in a few seconds, while father and daughter were still gazing earnestly upwards, the beautiful luminary was totally eclipsed.

The next morning found Millicent and her faithful Nora sole inhabitants of Sea Vale Cottage. Vernon had accompanied Colonel Aboyne to the place of embarkation—an opportunity of confidential intercourse with his future son-in-law gladly

embraced by the anxious traveller. To Vernon he spoke unreservedly of his own internal conviction, that in spite of that present renovation, which he gratefully acknowledged as providentially granted for the prosecution of his immediate purpose, the termination of his earthly sojourn was at no great distance. He spoke of her, who would then be a destitute orphan, and he accepted, as solemnly as it was offered, Horace Vernon's voluntary promise, in case of an unfavourable issue to his present undertaking, and of life not being spared him to return to Sea Vale, then to take to himself his affianced wife so soon as he could win her consent to accompany him to the altar,—and taking up his abode with her under that lowly roof, which would be wellnigh all the poor Millicent's portion, resolve for her sake cheerfully to contend with present—even protracted difficulties, and so await (patiently trusting in Providence) those better days they were reasonably encouraged to look forward to. It was also settled between the friends, that with Millicent's consent the same arrangement should take place soon after Colonel Aboyne's return from Ireland, were that return permitted, though unblessed

by a favourable result to the business which impelled him thither.

So having spoken, and confided to each other their mutual wishes and anxieties, the old man and the young one, the almost father and son, parted at the place of embarkation, with a fervent blessing and a short farewell—and from Colonel Aboyne, as he stept into the boat, a look to Vernon, and an emphatic pressure of the hand, which, more touchingly than language, commended the absent Millicent to her lover's protection.

If soberizing time, and protracted expectation, had abated somewhat of Vernon's first enthusiastic passion, his feelings for Millicent were still those of sincere and tender interest; and with all the affecting circumstances of his late parting with her father fresh in his recollection, it was with a revival of even more than former tenderness that he met her on his return, at the little garden gate before the cottage, of which she was now the sole, sad occupant. Deep and fervent was at that moment his unuttered vow to be indeed friend, father, protector, husband—every thing to the dear and gentle being who might so soon be dependent on

him for her all of earthly comfort. Few words passed between them at their first greeting. Vernon hastened to answer Millicent's inquiring look with an assurance, that all was well with her dear father when they parted; and then the two entered the cottage together, and seated themselves in the small bay window, neither however occupying the large arm chair, which stood with its cushioned footstool in the accustomed place. Both looked towards it; and Vernon perceiving the direction of Millicent's tearful glance, and well comprehending the subject of her fond solicitude, exerted himself to comfort and reassure her, till by degrees he lured her into the indulgence of more cheerful thoughts and happier expectations. But as he looked earnestly in her mild, fair face, he was struck with the increased transparency of a complexion, always peculiarly delicate, but now beautiful with an almost fearful beauty; for the naturally pale, though clear and healthful cheek, now bloomed with a spot of the brightest carnation; and quickly glancing at the hand he held within his own, he almost started at observing its sickly hue and evident attenuation.

"Are you well, Milly?" he asked abruptly, "quite well, dearest Millicent? This little hand tells a feverish tale,—and those cheeks!—fie! fie! Milly! *You* have been a self-tormentor of late." And he was but half satisfied with her assurance that she was not ill—had nothing to complain of, only a little occasional languor—and now that he had brought her such consoling tidings of her dear father's progress, she would rouse herself to hope and cheerfulness, and the resumption of all their favourite pursuits and occupations.

When Nora opened the cottage gate to let out Vernon that evening, he lingered a moment to speak a kind word or two to the faithful old servant, and then, suddenly reverting to his late startling observations, he said, "Millicent has been worrying herself to death, Nora, with anxiety about her father. We must take better care of her and prevent this, or she will fret herself into a fever; I was quite struck this evening with her altered looks."—"And was you indeed?—and time you should, maybe," answered Nora, in her driest and least cordial tone,—for *she* had long discerned a change in her darling's health and spirits, which had escaped even the pa-

rental eye ; and with the shrewd quickness of doting affection, she had not failed to remark, that though the affianced lovers were together as much as formerly, and though they met and parted, to all appearance, as affectionately as ever, their separation was too often followed by a cloud on Millicent's brow, which had not been used to hang there during such brief absences; and more than once Nora had surprised her weeping in her own little chamber, after her return from a walk with Vernon. It was therefore that she replied to his questions with almost reproachful coldness; but her slight and vague displeasure was soon appeased by the unaffected warmth with which he now poured forth the apprehensions she had succeeded in rousing so effectually; and he slept not that night for thinking of Millicent's burning hand and crimsoned cheek, and for wishing it were day that he might revisit the cottage, and urge her to see their good friend the village apothecary, and consult him respecting those symptoms of feverish debility, which he was now persuaded had been long hanging about her, though his own perceptions of the evil had been so tardily awakened. Full of these

anxious thoughts and intentions, he presented himself at Millicent's breakfast-table, just as she had descended from her own chamber; but felt almost immediately reassured by a first glance at the now natural hue of her fair complexion, the calm smile with which she greeted his appearance, and the soft coolness of the hand extended to meet his with affectionate welcome. His previous anxiety, and his earnest wish that she should consult Mr. Henderson, were not left unmentioned, however; but, by the time breakfast was over, Millicent had so well succeeded in talking and smiling him out of his fears, that when Nora came in to remove the tea equipage, he could not forbear casting towards her one glance of almost reproachful exultation, which, however, obtained no other return than a look of discouraging seriousness.

But after a little time, even Nora's fond apprehensiveness began to yield to the comforting evidences of her darling's daily renovation. Long, and frequent, and satisfactory letters arrived from Ireland—satisfactory at least as to the point she had most at heart, the welfare of her beloved father. Colonel Aboyne gave her the most positive assu-

rances, that he had received unexpected and extraordinary benefit, from the stimulating effects of his voyage and journey, and the influence of his native air; and in his first letter, he expressed sanguine hope of a favourable result to the business he was engaged in. Succeeding accounts, however, became on that head more discouraging. Colonel Aboyne's flattering expectations were soon overclouded—at last totally relinquished; but still he wrote cheerfully, consolingly,—spoke of himself as returning as poor a man, indeed, as when he left his Milly and their dear cottage, but a renewed one in health and vigour, and again looking forward with tranquil hope, not only to the union of his children, (for so he called both Horace and Millicent,) but, with God's blessing, to see them assured of that moderate competence which had already been withheld so far beyond the term of human calculation. And then Vernon breathed into Millicent's ear the arrangements which had been entered into by her father and himself, respecting their almost immediate union on Colonel Aboyne's return from Ireland, whatever might be the result of his visit to that country; and Millicent, though she

listened with surprise and agitation, did not refuse to ratify a compact so tenderly and sacredly hallowed.

Colonel Aboyne's last brief letter was merely to mention the day of his embarkation, and that on which, to an *almost certainty*, he might be expected at Sea Vale; "and even *now*," he wrote—"while I trace these few last lines, methinks I see our own dear cottage, my Milly looking anxiously out for me from the garden gate, and Horace advancing down the green lane, in readiness to receive the old cripple, and help him carefully down the ladder-steps of the stupendous High-flyer. Be there both of you, my children, that we may together re-enter that peaceful abode, soon, I hope, to shelter us *all* beneath its roof, one united and contented family of love."

But God had appointed otherwise. On the evening of that day, which should have restored the father and the friend to his expecting dear ones, there was a sound of weeping and lamentation, of "woman's wail," within the darkened parlour of Sea Vale Cottage, where three persons were assembled together, (all distinction of rank forgotten in the com-

mon sorrow,) to mingle their tears for the long absent—the fondly expected—who was never more to re-enter his earthly habitation—whose "place was to know him no more."

The packet on board which Colonel Aboyne had taken his passage had foundered in mid-channel; and of the few who were saved, he was not. Millicent was an orphan!

CHAPTER IX.

Autumn was fast fading into winter, when the heavy tidings of her sudden bereavement fell like an ice-bolt on the heart of Miss Aboyne. And long it was before the unremitting tenderness and attention of her now sole earthly protector—her betrothed husband—and the more than maternal cares of her faithful Nora, were rewarded by any indications of reviving health and cheerfulness in the object of their mutual anxiety.

Passing the common love between parent and child, had been that which bound up, as in one, the hearts of Colonel Aboyne and his motherless daughter; and the reflection that, for *her* sake, this beloved father had undertaken the voyage which had terminated so fatally, failed not to dash her cup of sorrow with peculiar bitterness. The suddenness of the shock had also tried to the uttermost her

delicate and already impaired constitution ; and for a considerable time it required all the sedulous care of love and fidelity, and all the skill and unremitting watchfulness of her medical adviser, to avert the threatening symptoms of decline.

But not only was Millicent Aboyne too truly a Christian to sorrow like those who have no hope, but even in *this world* she felt and gratefully acknowledged that she *had hopes*, and dear ones ; and that, if it pleased God to restore her to health, the after life that was to be passed with the husband of her choice, to whom she had been consigned, in a manner, by the dying breath of her beloved father, would be one of sweet contentedness. Therefore, when she prayed fervently to be reconciled to God's will in *all things*, she thought *it no* sin to add to that petition, a humble and pathetic supplication for continued life, if He saw that it was expedient for her ; and the boon so submissively implored was, to present appearance, graciously conceded. Returning health once more re-invigorated the long-drooping frame, and again there was hope, and cheerfulness, and innocent enjoyment, and sweet companionship, in the orphan's home.

Then it was that Vernon began to urge her on the subject of an immediate union, with affectionate and forcible persuasion; and Millicent was too well aware of the reasonableness of his arguments, and too nobly free from all taint of affectation, to hesitate a moment in acceding to his entreaties, except from motives of tender reluctance to exchange her mourning dress for bridal raiment, before the expiration of a twelvemonth from the time of her irreparable loss. She was also desirous, with God's blessing, to feel her health more perfectly re-established before she took upon herself the responsibility of new and important duties; and finally, a compromise between the lovers was definitively arranged, that in three months from that last May morning which completed the sixth month from her father's death, Millicent Aboyne should become the wife of Horace Vernon.

Few, on either side, were the requisite marriage preparations. Little of worldly goods had each wherewith to endow the other. On Vernon's side, only the small stipend of his curacy; on that of Millicent, no more than the property of her little cottage, and the broken sum of that small hoard,

which was all Colonel Aboyne had been enabled to bequeath to his orphan daughter. Added to her scanty heritage was, however, one heirloom, justly valued by Millicent as a jewel of great price. The faithfully devoted Nora was never to be sundered from her foster-child; and with her aid and experience, the latter smilingly promised Vernon, that comfort and frugality should go hand in hand in their future establishment. Already Horace had assumed the management, not only of Millicent's flower-beds, but of the whole productive and well-arranged little garden; and he never quitted the small domain to return to his solitary corner of the large rambling old Rectory, (occupied in part payment of his scanted dues,) without longing more and more impatiently for the approaching hour, when the gentle mistress of Sea Vale Cottage should admit him there, the wedded partner of her humble and happy home.

One morning Vernon entered Millicent's little sitting-room with an open letter in his hand, which he flung into her lap as she sat at work, with an air of half jesting, half serious discomposure. "There, Milly!" said he; "read that—and you may

expect me to come and take up my abode here *directly*, whether you will or not. Perverse girl! if you had not doomed me to such long exclusion, I should not now be annoyed by the contents of that provoking letter. Read, read, Milly! and revoke my sentence." The letter so ungraciously commented on was nevertheless an exceedingly well-turned, well-bred epistle, from no less a personage than the honourable and reverend Dr. Hartop, Vernon's rector, and the rector and holder of more than one other valuable living and comfortable piece of church preferment. He had not visited his Sea Vale flock since it had been committed to the care of the present curate; but his physician having recommended sea air and quiet, as restoratives after a long enfeebling illness, and cherishing in his own mind an affectionate recollection of the lobsters and turbot that frequent those happy shores, the honourable and reverend gentleman forthwith felt a conscientious call to bestow his pastoral presence for the summer months among his coast parishioners. He was to be accompanied in his retirement by the youngest of eight portionless daughters of his brother-in-law, the Earl of Marchwood, who, as well as

his amiable Countess, was always magnanimously ready to spare either of their blooming treasures, to enliven the solitude of their wealthy and reverend uncle, and smooth his gouty footstool. The noble parents, would, indeed, have extended the sacrifice to any number of the fair bevy Dr. Hartop might have been pleased to put in requisition; but that highly conscientious person not only revolted from exacting too much from such *all-conceding* generosity, but felt a strong conviction that his personal comforts would be more attended to, and the orthodox regularity of his household less deranged, by *one* of the lovely sisters, than if he had availed himself of the liberally-granted privilege to summon them in divisions. The privilege of selection he, however, exercised without scruple; and on the present occasion, was to be accompanied to Sea Vale by his favourite niece, Lady Octavia Falkland, a very lovely, gay, good-humoured, captivating creature of nineteen—"toute pêtrie d'esprit," said her French governess—brilliantly accomplished, and *(as every body said,)* "with the best heart in the world."

Lady Octavia was perfect, in short—or would

have been, but for some of those trifling alloys inseparable from *earthly* perfection: such as a *little* vanity, a *little* selfishness, a *little* cunning, and a *little* want of principle. To leave London in full season, with an old valetudinarian uncle, for "the ends of the earth," was, however, such a heroic sacrifice to duty as Lady Marchwood failed not to turn to good account, by descanting thereon with maternal sensibility, in the hearing of all with whom the touching trait was likely to *tell*—especially in the presence of a young Earl of immense property, lately come of age, and as yet encumbered with a few rustic prejudices in favour of religion and morality, the fruit of much seclusion with a sickly Methodistical mother, who had early instilled into the heart of her only child, "that peculiar way of thinking" which had strangely supported her through trials of no common character. Lord M—— had been evidently struck by the beauty of the fair Octavia, and as evidently captivated by her engaging sweetness. He had danced with her, talked with her, and, as was clearly perceptible to Lady Marchwood's discriminating eye, *watched* her still more assiduously; and still he

spake not—and on one or two late occasions, as he became more familiar with the *home* circle of Marchwood House, he had *looked* startled and uncomfortable at some interesting naiveté of the Lady Octavia (who, to do her justice, was seldom off her guard in his company); and then there was such a visible *réfroidissement*—a something so like drawing back, in his demeanour towards the lady, that her affectionate mamma, having lectured her pathetically on the consequences of her indiscretion, thought there was something quite providential in the Sea Vale scheme, of which she purposed to make the most in Lord M——'s hearing in the manner aforesaid. "And then," said she, "Octavia, when he comes down to us in the autumn, as you know he has half promised, if you WILL but be prudent for *a little while*, and fall naturally into his odd tastes and fancies, depend on it he *will speak*:" Which maternal consolation, combined with private visions of other contingent rewards to be coaxed out of the rich old uncle, and her constitutional good temper, enabled the fair exile to submit to her fate with a degree of resignation, not less edifying than amazing, considering

she was aware of all its horrors—of the perfect seclusion of Sea Vale, where the curate and apothecary were likely to be the only visiters at the Rectory. The said Rectory was a large, old-fashioned, but not incommodious mansion, of which, as has been said, a couple of rooms were occupied by Horace Vernon.

Dr. Hartop's letter (which had been so ungraciously received) very politely requested that Mr. Vernon would consider himself his guest during his, the Doctor's, residence at Sea Vale; and then went on to bespeak Horace's obliging superintendence of certain arrangements and alterations respecting furniture, &c. &c., especially in the apartments designed for the occupation of his niece, Lady Octavia Falkland. This letter was brought by the first division of the household; and Dr. Hartop and Lady Octavia were to be expected at Sea Vale in a week at farthest.

"And the old Rectory is half turned out of window already," said Vernon, pettishly, when he had told his story, and Millicent had glanced over the Doctor's letter—"and a whole waggon-load of things is arrived—couches, chaises longues, a French

bed, a whole steam kitchen, and a huge harp case among the rest. I dare say *that* Lady Octavia is very fine and disagreeable."

"A most candid conclusion, truly!" observed Millicent with a smile,—but it was a *half* smile only; for in her heart she was as much annoyed as Horace by the intelligence he had communicated. In former days, the arrival of these strangers would have been a matter of indifference to her, or perhaps of cheerful interest; but at present, scarcely recovered from the effects of recent affliction,—shrinking from the eye of strangers with a morbid timidity, which from long seclusion, had grown upon her natural diffidence,—still enfeebled in health, and not unconscious that her present situation was one of peculiar delicacy, Miss Aboyne would have indeed preferred that the Rector and Lady Octavia's visit to Sea Vale should have been deferred till *after* her union with Horace Vernon. Perhaps if he had, at that moment, more seriously enforced his jesting petition, to be forthwith admitted to the peaceful sanctuary of Millicent's cottage, she might have been induced to rescind her former decision, and cede to him, without farther

delay, the possession of herself and of her little dwelling. But Vernon talked away his vexation, and Millicent kept hers within her own heart, secretly chiding its utter unreasonableness; for what would the stranger be to her? She should not see or be seen by them but at church, and then, why need she shrink from observation,—if, indeed, one so insignificant should attract any?

The preparations at the Rectory went briskly on, and as the new and elegant articles of ornamental furniture were unpacked, Vernon insensibly became interested in examining them, and superintending the arrangements of Lady Octavia's boudoir. An elegant harp was extracted from its cumbrous case by a servant intrusted with the key, and, together with music-stands and stools, a painting easel, sundry portfolios, inlaid work-boxes, &c. &c. disposed in picturesque order in the dedicated chamber, and a pile of Italian music, two or three volumes of Italian and English poems, some French novels, and one of Schiller's dramas in the original, arranged with good effect on the different tables and *chiffonnières* by the well-trained footmen, gave the *tout ensemble* an air of so much literary ele-

gance, as failed not to make due impression on Vernon's tasteful imagination, and in some measure to soften down his prejudice (so unwarrantably imbibed!) against the unknown possessor. But still he had settled in his own mind, that in her deportment to *himself*, she would be reserved, distant, and disagreeable; and he promised himself to be as little as possible in her august presence. This preconception and predetermination savoured far less of judicious reasoning and amiable humility, than of ignorance of the world, and lurking vanity and pride; but it has been observed, that the latter were among Vernon's besetting sins, and the former was the unavoidable result of circumstances.

The important day arrived, and from the porch of Miss Aboyne's cottage, (in and out of which he had been fidgeting for the last hour,) Vernon spied a travelling carriage and four descending the hilly approach into Sea Vale. "There they are, Milly!" he exclaimed, suddenly letting fall her arm that had been resting on his, and starting involuntarily a few paces forward—"and I must be gone to receive the Doctor and that fine Lady Octavia.

It's all your fault, Milly, when I might have remained here, if you had pleased, and been independent of all this fuss and bustle;" and he turned back and took both her hands, gazing on her for a moment with a look of reproachful tenderness. "And how pretty and quiet every thing here looks this evening!" he added, glancing round him; "and we should have had some music in the honeysuckle arbour now you can sing again, Milly."—"Perhaps," replied she, faintly smiling, "Lady Octavia will sing to you."—"Oh! if she were to condescend so far, I should hate *her* singing; and that fine harp would never sound half so sweet to me as the dear old guitar, Milly."—Millicent thanked him with a look for the fond unreasonableness of the lover-like assertion, and then hastened him away to receive, with honour due, his honourable and reverend Rector. To say the truth, when his really affectionate feelings for her had given utterance to those few hurrying words, he did not seem *very* loath to obey her injunction; and, when he had cleared the green lane at three bounds, and turned the corner towards the Rectory, he stopped a mo-

ment to take off his hat, run his fingers through the bright waves of his fine thick hair, and pull up his shirt-collar to the most becoming altitude.

The Rectory and Miss Aboyne's cottage were situated at opposite extremities of the straggling village; and the distance between the two habitations being so inconsiderable, Millicent thought it not improbable she might see Horace again that evening, after Dr. Hartop's late dinner, or before the hour of retiring. More than once after twilight, and in spite of the fast falling dews, she returned to the garden gate, to listen if a well-known footstep were coming down the lane; and that night, long after the usual hour of its disappearance, a light was burning in Millicent's little parlour. But it was extinguished at last; and all was darkness, and quiet, and sweet rest probably, under the humble roof of the orphan's cottage.

The next morning, as Millicent was seated at her early breakfast, the little casement opened from without, and Vernon's handsome face, radiant with smiles and cheerfulness, looked in between the clustering roses. "What vulgar hours you keep, Milly," said he; "I'm positively ashamed of you,

Miss Aboyne! *We* are in our first sleep yet at the Rectory, and shan't breakfast these three hours."

"Look, then," she smilingly replied, "at this tempting bowl of rich new milk, and this brown bread, and fresh yellow butter of Nora's own making,—and the tea is as strong as *you* like it—see! —and such cream!—there can be none such at the Rectory. Won't all these delicacies tempt you to breakfast with me?"—"Half of them,—the least of them, dearest!" he answered, twisting himself dexterously in through the window, demolishing a whole garland of roses, and upsetting a work-table and a glass of flowers, in his unceremonious *entrée;* in spite of which high crime and misdemeanour, in two minutes he was seated with the ease of perfect innocence at Miss Aboyne's breakfast table, and there was no trace of stern displeasure in the face of the fair hostess, as she poured out for him the promised basin of potent green tea.

"You were right enough, Milly!" said Vernon, after demolishing a huge fragment of Nora's sweet brown loaf—(for it is a truth to be noted, that lovers as well as heroes never forget to "appease

the rage of hunger") "You were right enough, Milly! Lady Octavia is not half so disagreeable as I expected to find her. In fact she is really agreeable on the whole; certainly a lovely creature!--and she and Dr. Hartop were both exceedingly polite to me; but somehow I felt but half at ease. The Doctor's civility is so pompous, and now and then I could have fancied Lady Octavia too condescending. I wished myself here more than once in the course of the evening, but could not get away; for first the Doctor pinned me down to three games of backgammon"—"And then, I dare say, you had music, had you not?" asked Millicent. "Yes, Lady Octavia played all the time I was engaged with her uncle, and put me sadly out, by the by; for she plays so divinely, there was no attending to the game."—"So I suppose by this time you like the harp almost as well as the guitar?" said Miss Aboyne, with an arch glance at her companion.—"Not I, indeed!" replied Vernon, quickly, with a rather heightened colour; "though, to be sure, Lady Octavia was amazingly condescending —very considerate of the poor curate's ignorance and rusticity. She had been singing Italian while

I was playing with her uncle—some of our favourite things, Milly;—but when the game was finished, and I approached the harp, her Ladyship said, in the sweetest tone possible, 'I dare say you would rather have some English song, Mr. Vernon; perhaps I may find one or two among this unintelligible stuff,' and out she rummaged 'The Woodpecker' —my aversion, you know, Milly!"—Millicent, who knew Vernon's passionate taste for Italian music and poetry, (she herself, admirably taught by her father, had perfected him in the language,) could not help laughing at his evidently nettled recital of Lady Octavia's considerate kindness in lowering her performance to the supposed level of his comprehension; but perceiving, with a woman's quick perception in such matters, that even her innocent mirth was not contagious, (it is a nice affair to jest with wounded vanity,) she unaffectedly changed the subject, by drawing him into the garden, where she required his assistance, in some trifling office about her hyacinths, and soon beguiled him again into smiles and good-humour; and at last engaged him to accompany her own sweet voice, and the old fine-toned guitar, in one

of his favourite harmonies—not Italian, indeed, but a Scotch air of exquisite pathos, which had many a time before exorcised the foul fiend when its spell of fretfulness and despondency was cast over him.

Among the simple pleasures dear to Miss Aboyne, one of the greatest had ever been, from earliest womanhood, the quiet luxury of an evening walk; and now, in later life, that innocent pleasure had not only lost nothing of its pleasantness, but the charm of association, and the pensive joy of memory, cast a more hallowed tone over the hour of her favourite enjoyment. For many weeks, nay months, after her father's death, the impaired health of his sorrowing child incapacitated her from stirring beyond the narrow boundary of her own little garden; but of late, so much of health and strength had she regained, that, with the support of Vernon's arm, she had adventured to some distance from her home, and even beyond the village; and as the warm pleasant spring weather became more genial and confirmed, Millicent's fluctuating cheek became tinted with more permanent hues of health; and every evening she was able to extend her walk

a little and a little farther, with her unfailing and attentive companion.

Those only who have languished under the pressure of a lingering enervating malady, more trying perhaps to the moral frame than many acute disorders, can conceive the exquisite enjoyment of feeling enabled, by gradually reviving strength, once more to wander out beyond some narrow limits, within which the feeble frame has long been captive, to breathe the fresh free air of meadow or common, or the perfume of green briery lanes, skirting the clover or the bean field, the still requisite support of some kind arm ever punctually ready at an accustomed hour to lead forth the grateful convalescent. How impatiently is that hour expected!—and should any thing occur to protract or mar the promised pleasure, how far more acutely felt is that privation than so trifling a disappointment should seem to warrant! Far heavier crosses may be borne with more equanimity, at less cost of reason and self-control.

So of late had Millicent longed for the hour of the evening walk—the hour when her capabilities of enjoyment, physical and intellectual, were ever

keenest—when Vernon, released from his own peculiar duties and avocations, came, punctual almost to a moment, to be her companion for the remainder of the day, to afford her the support of his arm as far as her gradually returning strength enabled her to wander; and then, re-entering the cottage in tranquil happiness, to share with her the pure pleasures of reading, music, or sweeter converse, till her early hour of retiring. No wonder poor Millicent had fallen into the habit of longing for the return of evening! But now, for a season she must cease to do so. At least she must be content with uncertain, perhaps unfrequent and hurried visits from Vernon, after the late dinner at the Rectory; and Miss Aboyne had too much good sense and delicacy not to feel, and even enforce upon Horace, the propriety and common courtesy of giving his society, for at least the greater part of most evenings, to the host at whose table he was a constant guest. And truly, in the perfect seclusion of Sea Vale, and the present deranged state of Dr. Hartop's health, which precluded him from inviting to the Rectory any of those who might, perhaps, have charitably bartered

a portion of their precious time for the reverend gentleman's exquisite *cuisine* and old *hochheimer*, (not to mention the attractions of his lovely niece,) —the ready-made society of the young curate—his qualifications of backgammon-playing—of listening deferentially to long prosing stories, when the Doctor was disposed to tell them, or, when the latter was slumberously inclined, of discreetly and noiselessly stealing away to the drawing-room and Lady Octavia's harp, thereby contributing, in the dearth of stronger stimuli, to keep the young lady in that flow of good-humour so conducive to her uncle's comfort. These several qualifications, combined with the gentlemanly manners and unexceptionable character of Vernon, made his society too valuable at Sea Vale Rectory not to be monopolized there, with as much exacting selfishness as could be exercised consistently with Dr. Hartop's natural indolence and habitual good breeding.

Lady Octavia also conceived an *amiable* and immediate interest for the handsome, unsophisticated young curate, and forthwith set her fertile imagination to trace out the rough draft of a philanthropic plan for "making something of him," during

the summer seclusion to which she had so dutifully devoted herself. No passion is so vulgar or so vulgarizing as an insatiate love of indiscriminate admiration. The high-born and high-bred Lady Octavia Falkland, habituated as she was to the refined incense of courtly circles, would have condescended to smile on her uncle's apothecary, rather than have wasted "her sweetness on the desert air." Vernon was comparatively an unexceptionable protegé, and her benevolent scheme in his favour was by no means "nipped i' th' bud," by the information communicated by Mrs. Jenkins, while assisting her lady to undress on the night of her arrival at Sea Vale Rectory, of his engagement with Miss Aboyne. "What a stupid affair that must be!" soliloquized the Lady Octavia; "and how charitable it will be to give 'the gentle shepherd,' really so tolerable a creature, some idea of *la belle passion* in its higher refinements—of the tastes and enjoyments of civilized society, before he is buried for ever in a country parish, with a dowdy wife and a parcel of chubby cherubs.—I suppose," observed her Ladyship, more directly addressing herself to the confidential attendant—

"I suppose this, Miss—What d'ye call her?—is some rustic beauty, all lilies, and roses, and flaxen-curls; for really Mr. Vernon is so good looking, and so tolerable altogether, he would not have picked out a fright."

"Oh! they say she's very genteel, my Lady!—(Miss Abine's her name, my Lady!)—and used to be estimated rather handsome formerly, before she lost her father, and fell into ill health—and she's not so young as she has been."

"Why, Mr. Vernon can't be more than five or six and twenty, and it's impossible he can be in love with any thing as old as that, when there can be no *agrémens* to make amends for the want of youth."

"Oh! Mr. Vernon's seven-and-twenty, my Lady! and Miss Abine's near three years older."

"Three years older!—what, almost thirty?—You must be mistaken, Jenkins; Mr. Vernon could never have engaged himself so absurdly;—but it's an old affair, you said, didn't you, Jenkins? Quite a take-in then, no doubt; for I suppose she *has been* good-looking,—and boys are so easily caught! It's amazing how artful some old spiders are!—There's

Lady William Lorimer always contrives to hook in all the best men, somehow. But then she's married—that's one thing;" and so saying, the fair Octavia's head sank on her soft pillow, to dream of old spiders and young flies, the philanthropic pleasure of rescuing some fluttering innocent from the web of its wily destroyer, and the peculiar privileges and advantages of married ladies.

If Vernon's evening visits to the cottage became comparatively short and unfrequent after the arrival of the strangers, during the earlier part of their sojourn at the Rectory, he generally made his appearance at Millicent's early breakfast table, and devoted to her as great a part of every morning as he could abstract from his parochial duties—duties from which she would have been the last to entice him; and once he had stolen away during Dr. Hartop's after-dinner nap—not to the Rectory drawing-room and Lady Octavia, but to the cottage parlour and its gentle occupant, whose delighted and grateful surprise at sight of the unexpected visiter, made him first fully sensible of what she (the least selfish and exacting of human beings) had never even hinted—how lonely she had been in his ab-

sence; and he fancied, besides, that an appearance of more than usual languor was perceptible about her, though at sight of him a rich and beautiful glow suffused her before colourless cheek, and her sweet eyes glistened (not sparkled) with affectionate welcome, as she exclaimed, "Dear Horace! is it you?—How good you are to steal away to me! But could you do so without incivility?—what will they think at the Rectory?"

"I don't care what they think, Milly!" replied Vernon, quickly. "This is all very wrong—very hard upon us. Here you sit, left alone, evening after evening, deprived of exercise—of the quiet walks we so enjoyed together; and I am sure, though you said nothing, you have missed them very much. Why did you not take Nora's arm, and stroll out this fine evening, Milly?"

"O, I did not care to walk without you, dear Horace, and Nora is busy in her dairy at this hour, you know; and besides," she added with a cheerful smile, "I am very busy also, and shall get through a marvellous deal of work now you are not here to make me idle." That evening, however, Millicent was but too happy to relinquish her notable em-

ployment for pleasant idleness, and sweet companionship, and the reviving freshness of the bright green fields. The lovers talked together of their approaching union, their unambitious hopes of quiet happiness, their plans of active usefulness and wise frugality to be patiently and firmly pursued, till the better times, still prospectively before them, should arrive, to recompense them for the cheerful endurance of temporary privations. While they thus held sweet converse together, insensibly, as the evening shadows blended into twilight, assuming a more serious and tender tone, well befitting the discourse of friends who spoke of travelling together through time into eternity,—while they thus held sweet converse, and Vernon listened to the low accents of Millicent's voice—so tender in its melodious inflections—so touching as it breathed forth, with tremulous earnestness, the inmost thoughts and feelings of her pure and pious heart, he felt—felt deeply, the surpassing worth of the treasure committed to his care; and perhaps a vague, an almost indefinite, emotion of self-reproach mingled with the tender impulse which caused him to press more affectionately close the arm which

rested upon his, and to look round with moistened eyes on the calm, sweet seriousness of that saint-like countenance, upraised to his with the innocent confidence of an angel's love. "After all," said Vernon to himself, as he retraced his solitary way that night to the Rectory—"after all, my own Millicent is as superior to that brilliant Lady Octavia, as is yon beautiful pale moon to the bright meteor which has just shot earthward." What inference may be drawn from this soliloquy as to the nature of foregone comparisons floating in Vernon's mind within the circle of Lady Octavia's fascinations, we leave to the judicious reader's opinion;—certain it is, that the last fervent conclusion was the genuine, spontaneous effusion of sincere and affectionate conviction.

The next day was Sunday, and Vernon had promised to be at the cottage early enough to conduct Millicent to church, and to her own pew adjoining the Rector's, before the general entrance of the congregation; for though he assured her, that Dr. Hartop considered himself still too much a valetudinarian to encounter the fatigues of early rising and morning church, and that there was little

chance, from what he had observed, of Lady Octavia's attending the first service, Millicent had a nervous dread of walking alone up the long aisle, subjected to the possible gaze of strangers, and gladly accepted the promise of Vernon's early escort.

But Fate and Lady Octavia had ordered otherwise. Contrary to Vernon's "foregone conclusion," and just as he was hastening away to the cottage, it was sweetly signified to him by Mrs. Jenkins, that her lady, who had hitherto taken breakfast about eleven in her own boudoir, would that morning have the pleasure of making tea for Mr. Vernon, from whom she should afterwards request the favour of conducting her to the Rectory pew. The lady trode on the heels of her message. The breakfast-room was thrown open, and she led the way into it with gracious smiles and winning courtesy, Vernon following in such a bewilderment of annoyance at being thus compelled to break his engagement with Millicent, and of admiration for Lady Octavia's blooming graces and captivating sweetness, that he quite forgot it would have been at least expedient to send a message to the cottage;

and, strange as it may seem, by the time breakfast was half over, Vernon had actually ceased to think of any object in heaven or earth beyond the interior of the Rectory parlour.

As Lady Octavia took his arm on proceeding towards the church, however, a thought darted across him, of her who was at that very moment expecting the promised support of that very arm in affectionate security; and for a few minutes he was troubled and *distrait*, and made irrelevant answers to Lady Octavia's remarks and questions. Her Ladyship had too much tact to notice the temporary abstraction; and before they reached the thronged churchyard, Vernon's thoughts were again engrossed by the charms of his fascinating companion, and his besetting sin—his lurking vanity—was not a little excited by her flattering condescension, and the eclat of making so public an appearance with the high-born beauty familiarly leaning on his arm. It was not until he had conducted the fair stranger through the double file of gazers that lined the long central aisle, up to the Rector's pew, and left her there, properly accommodated with bassock and Prayer Book, and till he had withdrawn to

put on his surplice in the vestry—it was not till then that a thought of Millicent again recurred to him. But then it did recur, and so painfully, that even after he had ascended the pulpit, and was about to commence that sacred office which should have abstracted his mind from all worldly concerns, he found it impossible to restrain his wandering and troubled thoughts; and his heart smote him, when, glancing downwards on the assembled congregation, his eyes rested on the empty pew where poor Millicent should have been already seated, and that immediately adjoining already occupied by the fair stranger whom he had conducted thither.

CHAPTER X.

It was the custom at Sea Vale Church to begin the first service with the morning hymn, not one verse of which was ever omitted by the zealous throats of the village choristers; and on this particular morning, those sweet singers of Israel, in concert—or rather out of concert—with bassoon and bass viol, had groaned, droned, and quavered through the first five verses, when the church door fronting the pulpit, at the end of the long middle aisle, slowly opened, and two female forms appeared at it. One, the humble, homely person of Nora Carthy, dropped aside into some obscure corner; and Miss Aboyne, who had been leaning on the arm of her faithful attendant, came slowly and timidly up the long aisle with ill-assured and faltering steps, her tall slender form bending under evident languor and weakness. She still wore the

deepest and plainest mourning, and her face was almost entirely concealed by a large bonnet, and a long crape veil. On reaching the door of her own pew, her tremulous hand—even from that distance Vernon saw that it trembled—found some difficulty in unhasping it, and an old grey-haired man started forward from his bench in the aisle to render her that little service, in return for which, she gently inclined her head, and in another moment had sunk on her knees in the farthest corner of the pew.

Vernon saw all this, too well recalling to mind poor Millicent's nervous anxiety to be quietly seated in church before the arrival of strangers; and he saw, besides, what he hoped had been unperceived by Miss Aboyne through her thick veil, that Lady Octavia had stood up in her pew to gaze on the late comer, as she slowly advanced up the church, and was still taking leisurely survey through an eye-glass of her kneeling figure. Vernon observed all this with acutely painful consciousness, and when the hymn was concluded, it was only by a powerful effort that he applied himself seriously to his solemn duty.

When next he glanced towards Miss Aboyne's pew, (while the first psalm was being sung,) her veil was flung back, and he observed with pleasure, that her sweet countenance wore its wonted expression of perfect serenity, and that she was too intent on the sacred words in her hymn-book, and too much engrossed by the utterance of her tribute of prayer and praise, to be sensible that the brilliant eyes of her fair neighbour, still assisted by the raised eye-glass, were fixed in curious scrutiny of her person and features. In truth, Miss Aboyne had perfectly recovered the nervous trepidation which had distressed her on first entering the church; awful consciousness of the Creator's presence soon superseded all thought of the creature in her pious heart; and when at last her eyes caught an accidental glance of her fair neighbour, the only feeling that for a moment drew her earthward, was one of admiration for Lady Octavia's striking loveliness. In her entire abstraction from *self*, not even did the consciousness occur, that she herself was the object of curious, and not polite—though it might be fashionable—examination.

Millicent had attributed to its true cause the non-

performance of Vernon's promise to be early that morning at the cottage. She surmised that he might have been unexpectedly detained to accompany Lady Octavia to church; and well aware that he could not courteously have declined that office if proposed to him, she only regretted that, having been delayed by lingering expectation till the last possible moment, she should now have to encounter the redoubled ordeal of walking up the church alone, through the assembled congregation. Nora, indeed—whose arm, in default of Vernon's, was put in requisition—the warm-hearted, quick-spirited Nora—was fain to mutter some tart reflection about "new comers," and "fine doings," and "no notion of it," as she accompanied her fair mistress to church; but the more candid Millicent only smiled at the jealous discomposure of her fond nurse, who shook her head incredulously at the assurance that Vernon would come and make his innocence clear, the moment he was at liberty to steal away for a few moments to the cottage. And such indeed was his full intention, when, on hastening back from unrobing after service, he found Lady Octavia awaiting his escort homewards, and

that Miss Abyone was already out of sight. When they reached the Rectory, Dr. Hartop was already seated at his luxurious luncheon—the mid-day dinner of modern times—and Vernon was pressed to partake before he mounted his horse for the church (some five miles from Sea Vale) at which he was to do afternoon duty.

Suddenly Lady Octavia was seized with a devout desire of attending that second service, and her phaeton was ordered to the door, and it was quickly arranged that she should drive Vernon to Eastwood Church, from which they were to return by a more circuitous, but very beautiful road, which her Ladyship (as suddenly smitten with a passion for picturesque as well as holy things) expressed a vehement desire to explore. Dr. Hartop gave a reluctant assent to this arrangement, not from any prudential scruples respecting Lady Octavia's *tête-à-tête* with the handsome curate, as he felt comfortably assured her Ladyship's views of an "establishment" were as remote as possible from the *beau ideal* of a cottage and a blackberry pudding; but the honourable and reverend Doctor rationally anticipated that the protracted drive

might interfere with his regular dinner hour, and from this solid ground of objection it required all Lady Octavia's powers of coaxing and persuasion to win him over to unwilling concession.

The road from Sea Vale to Eastwood, lay through the former village, close to Miss Aboyne's cottage at its outskirts. As they approached the little dwelling, Vernon sent onward an uneasy furtive glance, and felt annoyed and uncomfortable at the slow pace in which it seemed just then the pleasure of his fair conductress to indulge her beautiful bay ponies. He wished—yet wherefore was almost undefinable to himself—that Miss Aboyne might not be visible as they passed the cottage, and that they might pass it unobserved by her. But the wish, vague as it was, had scarcely arisen, when Lady Octavia, reining in her ponies to a walk, exclaimed—"What a sweet cottage!—a perfect cottage that, Mr. Vernon;—and there's the person who sat in the next pew to my uncle's at church this morning, looking so wretchedly forlorn and sickly, but really genteel for that sort of person, and must have been rather pretty when she was young, poor thing! Do you know who she is,

Mr. Vernon?"—"A Miss Aboyne, daughter of a Colonel Aboyne, lately dead—a friend of mine," replied Vernon confusedly, and colouring, with a consciousness that he did so not tending to remove his embarrassment.

At that moment, Millicent, who was standing among her flower-beds, looked up at the sound of wheels, and their eyes encountered. A bright flush passed over her pale cheek, as she gave Vernon a half smile of recognition, and quietly resumed her occupation of tying up a tall lily, her face shaded by a large bonnet from further observation. Lady Octavia took another deliberate survey of Miss Aboyne through her eye-glass, and having so far satisfied her curiosity, continued, in a careless, half-absent manner—"Oh! a friend of yours, you said, Mr. Vernon?—this person's father—I beg your pardon though—she looks really very respectable, poor thing!—quite interesting in that deep mourning. Of course, as you know her, she is not a low person—some Colonel's daughter though, you said, I think? and is he lately dead? and does she live all alone in that pretty cottage? How excessively romantic! and it does not signify for that

sort of person, at her age, you know. I suppose she is very poor—some half-pay officer's daughter?" Vernon stammered something, not very intelligible, in reply to Lady Octavia's half question, half soliloquy; but her Ladyship talked on, apparently heedless of his conscious, embarrassed manner.

"Do you know, Mr. Vernon, that my maid is a half-pay officer's daughter—really a very superior sort of person is Jenkins. Why does not this Miss —I forget her name—go out in some such capacity? or as a governess?—you know, she might get into some family as governess."—Vernon's latent spirit and real affection for Millicent being somewhat roused by these annoying comments and interrogations, he was just about to speak more plainly, and would probably have silenced Lady Octavia's voluble malice, by the simple avowal of the relation in which he stood to Miss Aboyne, when her Ladyship, who guessed the coming confession, which it was by no means her intention to draw forth, adroitly diverted her observations from Miss Aboyne to the surrounding scenery; and before they had well lost sight of Sea Vale, Vernon's

spirited impulse had subsided, and he was again engrossed by Lady Octavia, and the gratification of being so graciously distinguished by the high-born beauty. But Lady Octavia's shafts had not glanced harmless; more than one point remained rankling in the mark; and with the next disengaged hour and thought of Millicent, came hitherto unformed reflections in the lingering lot of poverty and obscurity to which they were possibly about to devote themselves, and an involuntary comparison between their ages for the first time occurred to him, in a light that made him wish the difference had been reversed, and that he could count those two years in advance of Millicent. But his better feelings caused him to check, almost as soon as conceived, thoughts that were now as ill-timed as ungenerous towards that gentle and confiding being, the most sincere and lowly-minded of all God's creatures, who had been long beforehand with him in regretting, for his sake, her seniority of age, and had not shrunk from commenting on it to himself, with characteristic ingenuousness; for *she felt*, though he would not acknowledge it, that her prime was already past, while he had barely at-

tained the full flush of maturity. But Millicent's self-depreciation was wholly untinctured with any jealous doubt of Vernon's true affection for her, and indifference to the more youthful attractions of other women; and as he passed the cottage with his beautiful companion, if a sudden and natural comparison presented itself between the blooming loveliness of the latter, and her own more humble pretensions, it was only accompanied by a wish—a woman's fond, weak wish—that, for his sake, she were younger, and fairer, and every way more deserving of the love, of which, however, she apprehended no diminution.

Dr. Hartop's fears were prophetic; the picturesque circuit home delayed the arrival of Lady Octavia and Vernon so long past the dinner hour, that the Doctor's habitually urbane and placid temper would have been seriously discomposed, had he not that morning, in the course of a long visit from Mr. Henderson, the Sea Vale Æsculapius, acquired some information respecting the matrimonial engagements of his young curate, and the circumstances thereto relating, which, in the dearth of more interesting gossip, was not only acceptable

to the worthy Rector's craving appetite and accommodating taste, but would furnish him, *par les suites*, with a fair field for indulging his benevolent propensity and peculiar talent for giving gratuitous advice with patronising condescension. Therefore he looked but tenderly reproachful at Lady Octavia, though the fins of the turbot were boiled to rags, and various other dishes, reduced to *consommés*, gave touching testimony of her cruel inconsideration; and scarcely had the servants left the dining-room, when, giving three preliminary hems, and an inward chuckle, with which he was wont to preface his discourses in the pulpit and elsewhere, the honourable Rector addressed his curate with a formal congratulation on his approaching marriage. Vernon's face crimsoned all over, as he bowed and stammered out a few words of awkward acknowledgment, stealing impulsively a furtive glance at Lady Octavia, who, affecting the most natural surprise in the world, artlessly exclaimed—"Married! —Mr. Vernon going to be married, uncle?—you don't say so? Oh, Mr. Vernon, how secret you have been;—and may we know to whom, uncle?" —"To a most unexceptionable and every-way re-

spectable and amiable young person, as I have this morning had the pleasure of learning from a friend of yours, my dear Mr. Vernon !—from good Mr. Henderson, who tells me that Miss Aboyne"—— "Miss Aboyne !" interrupted Lady Octavia, with a pretty shriek of sudden dismay; "dear me ! who could have thought it ? I would not for the world have"——"You know Miss Aboyne, then ?" asked the Doctor with some surprise, in his turn interrupting Lady Octavia.—"Oh ! I saw her to-day at church; and indeed she seems—she looks—that is, a—a *very* superior sort of person—I dare say very amiable, and excellent, and—You'll introduce me to Miss Aboyne, Mr. Vernon ? I assure you I am dying to know her."

Vernon, now compelled to speak, made some awkward attempts to explain, that Miss Aboyne, from ill health and recent affliction, would not perhaps be able to avail herself of the honour of an introduction to Lady Octavia; and then the Doctor, impatient of colloquial trifling, which delayed the pouring forth of his luminous and well digested ideas, proceeded to favour Vernon, not

only with his entire approbation of the projected union, but with an elaborate dissertation on domestic economy, by attending to the several branches whereof, (which he condescended to dwell on more particularly,) a country curate might maintain a wife and family, and bring up a score of children, with infinite comfort and propriety, on an income short of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum. "Of course, my dear Mr. Vernon!" the reverend gentleman went on to observe, "there can be no expensive luxuries, no idle superfluities, in such a modest and well-ordered establishment. But, after all, my dear sir! how little suffices for our *real* wants; and beyond those, what Christian character or philosophic mind would——Octavia! do, pray, desire that the gardener may be written to about these pines; it is really scandalous!—they cost me a guinea a-piece, and this is the second I have cut to-day, and both uneatable. Send me the guava——But, as I was proceeding to observe—as I was going on to remark to you, Mr. Vernon—beyond our real necessities, (mere food and raiment,) what physical wants and temporal cares

are worthy the consideration of a Christian and a philosopher? It hath been truly said—

> 'Man wants but little here below,
> Nor wants that little long.'

And with regard to the article of food especially, I am persuaded, Mr. Vernon, and after long and mature deliberation on the subject, I feel no hesitation in declaring my entire conviction, that in no part of the United Kingdom is the infant population more hale, healthful, and multitudinous, than where oatmeal or potatoes, with milk, or even pure water, forms its unvaried and unsophisticated aliment. Therefore, my dear sir, with regard to your future family, (those numerous olive-branches with which it is my sincere prayer that Providence may surround your table,) I have no hesitation in strenuously advising"——

What the Doctor proceeded to advise must remain for ever secret between himself and Vernon, whose feelings, during the present harangue, can only be compared to those of a person undergoing the "*peine forte et dure*," and who experienced proportionable relief when Lady Octavia, tired of continuing a silent *tiers*, arose to retire. As she

passed him at the dining-room door, which he had hastened to hold open for her, she shook her fair head with a look of pretty anger, and archly putting up one taper fore-finger to her rosy lip, said softly, "Oh, fie! fie! Mr. Vernon!—how treacherous you have been!" Vernon slowly and reluctantly returned to his mitigated penance; but far be it from us to review in detail the protracted torments of that mortal hour, during which the honourable and reverend gentleman, warmed with his own eloquence—charmed with his own theory—exalted with a sense of his own philanthropy, and with a consciousness of the lights which flowed in the faster as he continued to diffuse them—poured out his oracular suggestions with a condescending suavity that descended to the most minute particulars. At length, however, articulation thickened—sentences lagged at their termination—words came slower—syllables dropt away to indefinite sounds—and at last, in a final bewilderment of—"As I was saying, Mr. Vernon—I repeat, my dear sir!—that—that—I have no hesitation—in af-af-fir-r-r"—the comfortable double chin of the respectable adviser sank, embedded in its own rolls, on his

ample chest, an incipient snore chimed in with the struggling affirmation, and after an attempt or two of guttural thickness, which sounded like "pease-porridge—cheap and wholesome," and "Mrs. Rundell," broke out into a grand continuous bass. Then, quietly and cautiously, Vernon rose from his seat of torture—quietly and cautiously he stole towards the door; but not so noiselessly did he effect his exit as to be wholly unnoticed by the half-conscious slumberer, whose drowsy attempts at articulation forthwith recommenced, but only to commission his curate, who thanked heaven for his escape, with a message to the Lady Octavia. After the scene of his recent mortification, of which her Ladyship had been a witness, Vernon would gladly, had he been permitted, have avoided an early *tête-à-tête* with her, and his heart told him he was anxiously expected elsewhere; but the Doctor's message *must* be delivered—it need not delay him three minutes; and, with a determination that it *should* not, and hat in hand, he sprang up stairs, and into the drawing-room, from whence issued the sweet sounds of Lady Octavia's fine-toned harp and finer voice deliciously blending in an aria of

"Semiramide."———Another voice, less powerful but more touching, accompanied by an humbler instrument, was breathing out, at this self-same hour in the orphan's home, such strains as well befitted the Sabbath vesper. Often did that low melodious voice pause in a cadence, or hang suspended on a note, while the singer's head was suddenly upraised in a listening attitude, her long slender fingers suspended over the silent chords, and her eyes glancing anxiously through the little casement towards the garden gate.

Again and again recurred that anxious pause; each time the hymn resumed with tones less firm, and a more plaintive modulation; at last a deep and heavy sigh was the involuntary prelude; and as Millicent withdrew her eyes from the window, tears, which had been long collecting within their lids, fell on her listless fingers as she bent over her instrument, and endeavoured to renew the sacred harmony. It was but an endeavour. Her voice had become weak and tremulous; so, discontinuing the vocal tribute, she wisely resorted to silent communion with that book which contains "words in season" for all the soul's necessities—of peace for

the disquieted—of strength to the weak—of healing to the sorely stricken—of hope to the broken-hearted. Millicent found there the aid she sought; and when, as was her custom, she had joined with her old servant in their nightly sacrifice of prayer and praise, she was able again, and without effort, to smile cheerfully, and speak cheeringly to that faithful humble friend, the bursting indignation of whose affectionate zeal she endeavoured to repress with a sincere assurance of her own conviction, that the morrow would bring with it a satisfactory explanation.

Early the next morning—earlier even than Miss Aboyne's primitive breakfast hour, Vernon entered the little parlour just as Nora was removing the tea equipage. She scarcely vouchsafed to notice his entrance even with a look, and the grave severity of her countenance by no means tended to dispel the troubled surprise with which he had remarked her employment. "Nora!" he hurriedly exclaimed, "what are you about?—where is Miss Aboyne?—Not ill? not ill, surely?—God forbid!"

"About as well as some folks wish her to be, I doubt," shortly and bitterly replied the indignant

Nora, as she essayed, without farther parley, or even honouring him with a second glance, to pass Vernon with the tea-tray. But his fears were now too thoroughly awakened to permit her silent egress; and, grasping her wrist more forcibly than he was aware of, he said, "Nora! Nora! tell me, for God's sake, is she really ill?—is my Millicent" —— and his voice trembled with an excess of agitation that shook even Nora's predetermined inflexibility, and she so far relented as to inform him, (as, indeed, she had been especially enjoined, in case he should call thus early,) that Miss Aboyne was suffering only from headach, but would be well enough to rise and receive him a little later in the day. She could not find in her heart, however, to give the supplement of Millicent's message; namely, that the headach was, she believed, but the effect of a slight cold which she had taken the preceding day. In lieu of that assurance, so affectionately intended to prevent self-reproach on the part of Vernon, the wrathful Nora, who had by no means any tender consideration for his feelings, took upon her to substitute an "amendment," imputing the headach to a sleepless night,

and both the effect and its *immediate* cause to one far deeper, which she also vouched for on her own authority—the heartach; and then, giving way to the impulse of her warm and faithful spirit, the affectionate creature laid her hand on Vernon's shoulder, and, while tears filled her eyes as she fixed them earnestly on his, exclaimed—"Oh, Mr. Vernon! Mr. Vernon! did I ever think it would have come to this!—that my child! my jewel! the flower of the world! Colonel Aboyne's daughter! should be slighted for that proud lady, who only came here to break my darling's heart, and help you to dig her grave, Mr. Vernon! Ay, there she'll be soon, sir; and then you may go your ways and be happy;" with which comfortable and comforting assurance, Nora pushed by with her breakfast-tray, followed, however, by Vernon, who, though his worst fears were relieved by the first part of her communication, still went on to ask a hundred anxious questions, and commission the half-relenting nurse with as many tender messages, though the latter was too discerning and honest to feel or affect great reliance on his assurance, that he should sa-

tisfactorily account to Miss Aboyne for his apparent neglect of the preceding day.

The incredulous messenger conscientiously "told the tale as 'twas told to her," nevertheless, virtuously refraining from comment on "how the *truth* might be; and Millicent's heart was prompt to accept beforehand the promised explanation.

During the watches of a sleepless night, it was impossible but that troubled thoughts and vague surmises had crept into her mind, involuntarily and unencouraged, nay, quickly and perseveringly repressed, with the generous confidence of a nature not prone to think evil; but still they returned like the phantoms of a feverish imagination, and Millicent was indeed sick in spirit, as well as physically indisposed, when Nora first drew her curtains that morning. But very soon the fresh air and the bright sunshine, entering at the unclosed lattice, brought with them sweet influences redolent of happier and more hopeful feelings; and when Nora soon after returned with her report of Vernon's early visit and affectionate messages, Millicent smiled with perfectly restored cheerfulness, in-

wardly rebuking the weakness which had subjected her to such causeless uneasiness. Neither was she disappointed that morning of the promised speedy return. Neither, on the part of Vernon, was any thing left unsaid to make his peace (had that been necessary) with one whose gentle bosom harboured no accusing spirit; and when he left her late and unwillingly—in truth it was always unwillingly that he *did leave* her—it was with a pledge to steal away to her again in time for one sweet hour of evening-walk, and *more* than one after-hour of social happiness in the dear little parlour, where so many a past evening had stolen away with the swift unsounding pace of unworldly innocent enjoyment. And punctual, as in former days, was Horace Vernon to the hour of tryst; and never, perhaps, *even* in former days, had his voice and looks, when addressing Millicent, expressed feelings so deep and tender. Those feelings were not excited by *reviving* attachment, for his *true* affection had never been alienated from their first object; but if *his heart* had not strayed from its allegiance, his lighter fancy might *have* been more susceptible of other fascinations; and a conscious-

ness of this sort, and that he had for a time forgotten her who ever thought of him, perhaps it was, that imparted a shade of more than usual seriousness that evening to the expression of his large dark eyes, and of peculiar tenderness to his tone and manner. And for many succeeding days, even Nora's lynx-eyed jealousy detected no cause for dissatisfaction in any part of his conduct; and more than once Millicent hastened him from her side, where he was fain to linger, by reminding him of the lateness of the hour, and the courtesy due, on his part, to his entertainers at the Rectory. Of the fair lady who presided there, Vernon made less and less mention in his discourse with Millicent; though even now again a few words, a hasty remark, escaped him, that might have impressed an indifferent observer with a persuasion, that Lady Octavia's charms and opinions had, *at least*, their due weight with her uncle's handsome curate; and certainly the delightful *naivete* with which she had betrayed her admiration of his fine person and interesting character, had by no means depreciated Vernon's estimation of her Ladyship's refined taste and superior judgment. Lady Octa-

via had also performed, to the life, a few sallies of artless indiscretion and amiable enthusiasm, from which the gentleman was not very slow to infer, that she discerned in him intellectual as well as personal qualities of a higher order than even his affectionate Millicent gave him credit for. *She*, at least, had never administered that incense to his vanity which was so delicately, and of course *unconsciously*, offered by the Lady Octavia; still less had Miss Aboyne, in the humble simplicity of her heart, ever dreamt of *regretting* for Horace, that Fate (whose agency in human affairs she was not indeed wont to acknowledge) had marked out for him the obscure lot of a country clergyman. Millicent Aboyne could fancy no lot in life so peculiarly favoured. Lady Octavia Falkland had allowed Vernon to perceive that *for him*, capable as he was of—she never said exactly *what*—she considered it one of pitiable degradation. And there again, though Vernon's best feelings and more serious conviction sided with Millicent, the lurking weakness of his nature was grateful to Lady Octavia for her flattering prepossession.

"Millicent certainly loves me with true affec-

tion," once or twice soliloquized Vernon; "and yet how strange it is that she should have no ambition for me—that she should see me with less partial eyes than one to whom, comparatively speaking, I am nothing—at least"—and then broke in something very like a sigh—"to whom I can be nothing now;—but Milly has seen so *little* of the world, and Lady Octavia so *much*, and has such extraordinary insight into character!—so much warmth of feeling!—so much heart!"—Poor Millicent! wert thou cold and heartless?

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW days after Doctor Hartop's memorable after-dinner communication, Lady Octavia signified to Vernon her intention of calling that morning at Sea Vale Cottage, which condescending attention on her part had been hitherto delayed by his report of Miss Aboyne's increased indisposition, and her inability to receive visits. That cause of exclusion having ceased to exist however, he could no longer decline for Millicent the proffered courtesy. His own private reasons for wishing it could be altogether avoided he did not perhaps analyze very curiously; or rather he assured himself, that solely for Millicent's sake, who would in truth gladly have dispensed with the visit, he was thus considerately reluctant.

But now Lady Octavia was predetermined; she would go that morning—she would go directly—

and Mr. Vernon must escort and introduce her. And before he had well got through two or three not very neatly-turned sentences expressive of his sense of her Ladyship's kindness, and so on, he found himself with his noble and lovely charge at the entrance of Millicent's little cottage. In another minute, Nora (who, to Vernon's horror and dismay, presented herself with a brown coarse wrapper, tucked up sleeves, and blue coddled arms evidently fresh from the suds) had thrown open the door of the small parlour where Millicent was sitting at work; and Vernon's ruffled feelings were not smoothed to complacency by his quick nervous glance at the nature of her occupation, which was that of dividing, and folding with neat arrangement, certain lengths and squares of coarse dark household napery. Colouring and confusedly, without raising his eyes to the countenances of either of the fair ladies, he hurried through the ceremony of introduction; but the calm sweet tone of Millicent's voice encouraged him to look up, and then the natural grace and lady-like self-possession with which she received her beautiful visiter, relieved him in part from the uncomfortable feelings

which Lady Octavia's courteous ease and amiable *prévenance* also contributing to dispel, he found himself in a few minutes conversing with his fair companions with tolerable composure. Still his restless eyes glanced ever and anon at the coarse unhemmed towels, and then at the direction of Lady Octavia's eyes—and from her to Millicent, and again from Millicent to the titled beauty. Beautiful indeed the latter was at all times, but strikingly so at that moment. Lady Octavia had too much good taste, and too much confidence in the unassisted effect of her own charms, ever to overload them with fashionable frippery. Her costume that morning was a plain white muslin robe, setting off to the best advantage the perfect symmetry of a figure, about which a large India shawl had been carelessly wrapped, and was now suffered to fall in picturesque drapery off one shoulder. A large straw hat, tied loosely with a broad green ribbon, also fell back as she seated herself, so as to leave nearly uncovered a bright profusion of auburn hair, beautifully disarranged by the fresh morning wind, which had also communicated a richer glow to the peach bloom of her young cheek, and a more

sparkling vivacity to her laughing eyes. Vernon saw that Miss Aboyne's eyes were riveted admiringly on her lovely guest. His, but the moment before, had been drawing an involuntary comparison between the youthful beauty and his own sweet Millicent; and if, on one hand, he was too forcibly struck with the contrast of the opening and the waning rose—of the sheltered blossom, and the storm-beat flower—he observed also, with affectionate pride, that the interesting and intellectual loveliness of Miss Aboyne, her simple dignity and natural elegance, lost nothing by the closest comparison with the brilliant graces and perfect finish of the Lady Octavia.

With what extraordinary celerity will thoughts, deductions, conclusions, and endless trains of ideas and images succeed each other on the magic lantern of the mind! Vernon's mental mirror still reflected a confused and misty portraiture; that of the Lady Octavia presented far more definite and well-arranged conceptions.

On her way to the cottage, she had been weighing interiorly the comparative amusement to be derived from patronising Miss Aboyne, or break-

ing her heart—but her judgment rather inclined from the scale of patronage. In London, or in a full and fashionable neighbourhood, it might have been played off *à merveille*, with high credit to the protecting power; but what could be done in that way at Sea Vale? It would be more in character with that sweet seclusion to get up the other entertainment, which, with good management, might be wrought into a very pretty romance of real life, and last out the whole term of exile, leaving the catastrophe to follow—for Lady Octavia's feelings were modelled much after the dramatic taste of our Gallic neighbours, which interdicts murder *on* the stage. "However," resolved the candid schemer, "I will see this Miss Aboyne before I make up my mind." And the brief test of a few minutes' intercourse with the unsuspecting Millicent, sufficed to settle her Ladyship's plan of operations. She *felt*, almost at the first introduction, that Miss Aboyne *would not* be patronised—so set herself to work, with a clear conscience, on the other experiment.

"What a sweet cottage you live in, Miss Aboyne!" observed Lady Octavia, after a little desul-

tory conversation, during which she had been taking a critical survey through her glass of the little parlour and all within it. "What a sweet cottage!" she exclaimed, rising to complete her examination. "So neat! and so small and pretty! Do you know, Mr. Vernon," turning to Horace, "I quite adore it, it puts me so in mind of dear Falkland;—it's so like our poultry woman's cottage in the park!" Vernon coloured and fidgeted; but Millicent said, smilingly, that she was indeed partial to her little home, and gratified that its unpretending prettiness had excited a pleasing association in Lady Octavia's mind. "But do you really live here all alone, with only that old woman?" inquired her Ladyship, with a sweet expression of condoling interest, just sufficing to make it doubtful whether her impertinence were intentional, or artlessly indiscreet. "How very odd!—that is, I mean, how very delightful!—and I dare say you have always something to do—some useful work or other so superior to fashionable, trifling occupations! Do, pray, go on with that you was about when we came in, my dear Miss Aboyne. I would not interrupt you for the world—and it would real-

ly amuse me; do go on—it's delightful to see people so clever and notable. I should like to learn," and running to the table, Lady Octavia drew a chair close to it, and set herself to as grave and curious an inspection of the coarse manufacture Millicent had been employed in, as if each towel had been an ancient manuscript, and every stitch a hieroglyphic, or a Greek character. "Your Ladyship will scarcely find any thing in my homely work worthy the condescending attention you are pleased to bestow on it," quietly remarked Miss Aboyne, in whose character want of penetration was by no means the concomitant of simplicity, and whose sense of the ludicrous was keen enough to have excited a laugh at the solemn absurdity of her fair visiter's caprice, if good manners had not restricted to a smile the outward indication of her feelings.

"Ah! now I know what this is—I remember all about it," triumphantly exclaimed Lady Octavia, looking up from the object of her examination, on which, however, one rosy palm remained emphatically outspread. "This is hackaback, or shackaback, or some such thing—the same sort of stuff

mamma gives for pinafores to our school at Falkland. I wish I was half so clever and industrious as you are, Miss Aboyne, but I am afraid Mr. Vernon could tell you I am a sad trifling creature."

"Miss Aboyne's general avocations differ less from your Ladyship's than those she has selected for this morning's amusement," said Vernon, with an ill-concealed irritability that tingled to his very finger-ends; and nervously starting from his chair, he went towards Millicent's music-stand, and partly to prove his petulant assertion, as well as to withdraw Lady Octavia's attention from the hated work-table, he requested her to look over some manuscript Italian music which he hurriedly extracted from the pile. His request drew forth an exclamation of surprise from her Ladyship, as, approaching the music-stand, and taking the offered sheet, she cried, "Italian!—you sing Italian, then, Miss Aboyne? I suppose Mr. Vernon has been your teacher." Millicent looked towards Horace with arch meaning in her eyes; but taking the reply to himself, and speaking with generous warmth, and a countenance glowing with grateful acknowledgment, he said, "No, indeed!—your Lady-

ship does me too much honour; I am indebted to Miss Aboyne, and to one who was equally beloved and respected by her and by myself, for all my knowledge of Italian—for every acquisition I most value—for more than I ever can repay." There was a general pause. Lady Octavia wished she could have retracted a question which had excited feelings of a very different nature from those she designed to insinuate, and had drawn from Vernon so spirited an avowal of them. But the slight inadvertence led, at least, to one satisfactory conclusion.

Vernon's honourable warmth and affectionate allusion to her beloved father, touched the spring of deepest emotion in Millicent's bosom, and subverted in a moment the outwork of calm self-possession, which had maintained itself so successfully, and, in truth, so easily, against the oblique aim of Lady Octavia's puny missiles; and the deep flush that now mantled her before-colourless cheek, and the tears that swam in her dove-like eyes, were evidence unquestionable that Miss Aboyne *had a heart*, and one not altogether organized of "impenetrable stuff."

To do Lady Octavia Falkland justice, however, she did not meditate actual *murder,* on or off the stage, or any thing, indeed, but a little harmless temporary sport with the happiness of the two persons so long and solemnly contracted. She merely designed to assert the omnipotence of her own charms, by convincing Miss Aboyne that she had it in her power to make Vernon faithless to his early vows; and, with regard to Vernon himself, she only intended to give him a clear insight of the disadvantages which must attend his union with Miss Aboyne, and a despairing glimpse of the superlative felicity in store for the fortunate mortal who should awaken an interest in her own fair bosom. With guarded caution, also, she charitably inclined to indulge him with an experimental taste of *la belle passion,* such as it *might be* between sympathetic souls of a superior order; and then, having so far generously enlightened him as to the capabilities of his own heart, to leave him and his betrothed to complete their stupid union in their own dull way, and be "as happy as possible ever afterwards."

Millicent did not again see Vernon till late in

the morning which succeeded that of Lady Octavia's visit; but she received him then with looks that beamed a welcome even more affectionate than that with which they were ever wont to greet him. His warm tribute to her dear father's memory, so spontaneously uttered the preceding day in reply to Lady Octavia's uncivil observation, had been balm to her heart, and her grateful feelings were ready to overflow at his appearance. But he approached and greeted her with an unusual degree of coldness and constraint, and there was a cloud upon his brow, and an abstractedness in his manner, that quickly and effectually repressed the expression of a sensibility too tender and profound not to be keenly susceptible of the slightest repulse.

For some time few words passed between them. Vernon seated himself beside Millicent at the table where she was finishing some pencil sketches, and usefully employed himself in cutting up her pencils into shavings, and her Indian-rubber into minute fractions. At last—"Milly," said he, abruptly, "what can induce you to waste your time about such abominable work as you were employed in

when Lady Octavia called yesterday?—and to have it all spread out in your sitting-room too!—such vile, hideous litter!"

"My dear Horace!" mildly replied Millicent, looking up from her sketch with an expression of surprise, not unmingled with a more painful feeling—"my dear Horace! do you forget that, circumstanced as we are, my time is much more wasted in such an occupation as this, than it was in the homely task you found me engaged in yesterday? You know, Horace," she added, half smiling as she bent again over her drawing, "that Nora and I are very busy now providing for our future household comforts? But I will allow, such work as mine was yesterday is not ornamental to a sitting-room; you shall not find the little parlour so disgraced again, dear Horace."

The sweetness of the answer was irresistible; but though it made Vernon heartily ashamed of the weakness which laid him open to such paltry annoyance as that he had just made cause of complaint to Millicent, it could not immediately tranquillize his irritable mood, or charm him into forgetfulness of those tormenting thoughts and com-

parisons Lady Octavia had been too successful in exciting. Yet was he so sensible of their unworthiness, that he hated himself for the involuntary and unsuspected treason, and his heart smote him more sharply, when, a few minutes afterwards Millicent spoke of Lady Octavia's beauty with such unaffected admiration, as testified, had such proof been wanting, how incapable was the genuine humility and nobleness of her nature of envious self-comparison with the youthful loveliness of another. "I never saw such hair as Lady Octavia's!—such beautiful hair!" she observed, proceeding with her drawing and her eulogium.

"But *I have*, Milly, and much *more* beautiful," asserted Vernon, edging his chair nearer to hers; and in a twinkling, before her inquiring look had met the tender meaning in his eyes, he had dexterously removed her close mourning cap, and plucked out the comb that fastened up a profusion of the finest hair in the world, black and glossy as the raven's wing, which, thus released from confinement, fell in redundant masses over her neck and shoulders, waving downward almost to the ground as she sat, and, half shrouding her face and figure in

its cloud-like beauty, invested with somewhat of celestial character the touching loveliness of a complexion pure and transparent, and almost colourless as alabaster, and eyes of the dark violet's own hue, ("the dim brooding violets of the dell,") now upraised to Vernon with an expression of innocent surprise and *not* offended feeling.

"What a sin it is to hide such hair as this, Milly!" continued her lover, lifting aside one of its heavy tresses from her now smiling and blushing face, on which he gazed with a sudden and almost surprised conviction, that his own Millicent was a thousand times lovelier than Lady Octavia; and the evidently admiring fondness with which his looks were fixed upon her, did not lessen the suffusion of her cheek, though it quickly brought tears into her modest eyes, as they fell bashfully under their long black lashes. There is no such cosmetic as happiness; no such beautifier as the consciousness of pleasing, where we wish to please; and never was woman's heart indifferent to the gratification of being even *personally* pleasing to the object of her affections, whatever some superior-minded disagreeables may pretend to the contrary. Of late, some

half-defined idea had possessed itself (she scarce knew how) of Millicent's humble heart, that though she was still dear to Horace, not only for her own sake, but for her father's, and the remembrance of "auld lang syne," she had no longer any personal attractions for him; and she HAD FELT the contrast between herself and Lady Octavia, though, in her simple integrity, drawing from it no conclusion more painful or uneasy than that Horace *must* feel it also. But that sudden action,—those few words, —and, more than all, that look of his, conveyed blissful assurance that she was still beloved as in days gone by—still beheld with eyes as fondly partial. Vernon was quite right. His own Millicent was, at that moment, a thousand times more beautiful than the youthful and brilliant Lady Octavia.

It would extend this little history far beyond its prescribed limits, to continue a minute detail of those progressive circumstances which more immediately influenced the happiness and interests of Horace and Millicent, during the remainder of Dr. Hartop and Lady Octavia's sojourn at Sea Vale. The leading incidents must suffice to keep unbroken the thread of the narration. Miss Aboyne failed

not (however disinclined) to return Lady Octavia Falkland's visit, within a few days after that honour had been conferred on her; neither did Lady Octavia fail, during their *tête-à-tête* in her luxurious boudoir, to call Millicent's attention to sundry objects, affording indubitable proof—in the shape of copied music, verses, and sketches for albums, &c. &c.—that the whole of those long mornings, during which she saw little, and occasionally nothing, of Horace, were not devoted to the serious duties which she had been fain to persuade herself occupied at least the greater part of them. Had any lingering doubt still clung about her heart, Lady Octavia's considerate assurance (as the visiter rose to retire) was intended to remove it effectually. "I assure you I am quite shocked, Miss Aboyne," she said, with the sweetest deprecating manner in the world, "at monopolizing so much of Mr. Vernon's time; but he is so kind and obliging!—and then, you know, those men are such lounging creatures of habit; when he is once comfortably established on *that ottoman*," pointing to one at the foot of her harp, "there's no driving him away, though I often tell him"—— With what arguments her Ladyship

so conscientiously essayed to "*drive*" Vernon to his duty, Miss Aboyne gave her no time to explain; for even Millicent's gentle spirit was moved by the obvious malice and intentional impertinence of the insinuation; and rather haughtily interrupting Lady Octavia with an assurance, that she arrogated to herself no right whatever over Mr. Vernon's disposal of his time, which must be well employed in her Ladyship's service, she made her farewell curtsy, and returned to her own solitary home. Lady Octavia's eye followed her to the door, with an expression that said, "So—'let the stricken deer go weep:'" and that shrewd meaning implied something very near the truth. The arrow had struck home.

From that morning, Miss Aboyne considered herself absolved from the duty of returning any other of Lady Octavia's visits—who, on her part, becoming sensible that they did not co-operate as she had expected, with her amiable purpose, soon discontinued them altogether. But the worthy Doctor, desirous of testifying, in the most flattering manner, his gracious approbation of Vernon's choice, made a magnanimous effort to honour the object

of it, by paying his personal respects to her at her own dwelling, it is more than probable, with the benevolent intention of bestowing on her a few of those valuable hints on domestic economy, and the rearing up of a large family, with which, at all convenient seasons, he was wont to favour his fortunate and grateful curate. But adverse circumstances diverted from Millicent the good fortune intended for her, the anticipation of which (for Horace had prepared her for the visit) had in truth grievously disquieted her. Carefully enveloped in a warm roquelaure, (for though the noonday sun was scorching, the morning had been showery,) escorted by Mr. Vernon on one side, and his own valet, with a *parapluie*, on the other, the Doctor (having previously fortified himself with a basin of vermicelli soup) was wheeled in his Bath chair through the village of Sea Vale to Miss Aboyne's cottage—or, more properly speaking, to the garden gate leading to the little dwelling, for there his further progress was arrested by an unforeseen and insurmountable obstacle. The humble gateway was not wide enough, by at least a foot, to admit the Doctor's equipage; (it would scarcely have afford-

ed ingress to his own portly person;) and the little gravel walk, still flooded by recent showers, was impassable to the rheumatic gouty feet that trode "delicately" even on Brussels carpets. Moreover, on casting his eyes despairingly towards the cottage door, at which stood Miss Aboyne, (who, on perceiving the dilemma of her honourable and reverend visiter, had come forward thus courteously,) he conceived a well-founded suspicion, that even arrived at that inner portal, he should fail in effecting an entrance; wherefore, like a true philosopher, accommodating himself to circumstances. he gave two or three prelusive *hems*, with a view of complimenting the future bride, (even from that inconvenient distance,) with the speech he had conned in readiness. Already, to Vernon's horror and Millicent's dismay, he had begun, "My dear Madam! it is with infinite satisfaction that I do myself the honour"——when a heavy cloud, which, unobserved by the pre-occupied divine, had been gathering over head, began to discharge its liquid stores so suddenly, that the faithful valet, who waited not his master's commands to face about, gave the necessary word to the officiating footman;

and the Bath chair, with its reverend contents under shelter of the *parapluie*, was safely wheeled into the Rectory hall, before Millicent had well recovered her alarm in the uninvaded sanctuary of her little parlour.

CHAPTER XII.

Two months and more than half a third had passed away, since that May morning (almost the latest of the month) a few days prior to the strangers' arrival at the Rectory, when Vernon had won from Millicent her unreluctant promise to be indissolubly united with him that day three months. What changes had taken place since then—not in the fortunes and apparent prospects of the affianced pair, but in their feelings, habits, and relative circumstances! Vernon had gradually absented himself more and more from the cottage; for some time excusing himself to Millicent, and to his own heart, on various pretences, which, however, he felt would not bear the test of investigation. By little and little he discontinued even those poor unsatisfactory apologies—and Millicent was best content that it should be so; for even her blindness (the wilful

blindness of affection) was dispelled at last, and she felt within herself, and knew to a certainty in her own heart, that she should never be the wife of Horace Vernon. Yet did she not, for one single moment, suspect the sincerity of his intentions; nor doubt, that when the illusion was dispersed (she knew it to be an illusion) which now warped him from his *better self*, he would return to *himself* and to her, with bitter self-upbraiding, and passionate avowals of his own culpable weakness, and honourable anxiety to fulfil his engagements with her. Nay, she doubted not that she was still dear to him—she *scarcely* doubted that the best affections of his heart were still hers, however appearances might have led to a different conclusion—but she *more than* doubted, whether Horace Vernon and Millicent Aboyne could ever be again as they had been to each other; therefore she felt in her heart that it was better they should not be united. Yet, for all this, there was no change in her manner to Vernon—scarcely any perceptible change—only, perhaps, in lieu of the sweet, familiar cheerfulness with which she had been wont to carry herself towards him, there was a shade of deeper seriousness,

of more affecting tenderness, in her deportment, such as might have betokened, to a curious eye and a keen observer, something of those feelings with which the heart of one bound in secret on some far journey, may be supposed, on the eve of departure, to yearn towards a beloved friend, still unsuspicious of the approaching separation.

Millicent's generous confidence in Vernon's honour (in his *honourable intentions* at least) was not misplaced. Never, for a moment, had he harboured a thought of violating his engagements with her; and his heart, as she had been fain to believe, still turned to her as towards its real home at every lucid interval (the term is not inappropriate) of his spell-bound infatuation; and, on more than one late occasion, when some accidental circumstance, or thought suggested by his good angel, had aroused his slumbering conscience and better feelings, he had almost deceived the poor Millicent into reviving hope and trust by an overflowing tenderness of manner, more apparently impassioned than in the early days of their youthful attachment. In some such mood of mind he took his way towards the cottage about the period last mentioned,

a fortnight before the first of September, the day he and Millicent had long anticipated as that which was to unite them indissolubly. For some time past, however, it had been mutually understood, rather than arranged, between them, that their marriage should not take place till after the departure of the strangers, whose stay at the Rectory was not likely to be prolonged beyond the first week in September. That period now drew near —and Vernon remembered that it did, with a strange mixture of discordant feelings. He felt like one who has been long living, as in a dream, under the influence of some strange illusion, which was about to break away and leave him to the sober realities of his appointed lot. That morning, one of those trivial occurrences which often lead to important results in human affairs, tended very materially to hasten the dispersion of his airy visions. He had been present—for the time forgotten—when the letter-bag was brought in to Doctor Hartop, who delivered out from its contents one from Falkland Park to Lady Octavia; it was from one of her sisters, and the matter so interesting, so redolent of present pleasures, and fêtes in prepara-

tion, of noble and fashionable guests arrived and expected, (fashionable men more especially, some of whom were alluded to in slang terms of familiarity, sanctioned by the modern *manière d'être* of *high*-bred rather than *well*-bred young ladies,) that the fair reader for once gave way to the fulness of her heart, (seldom was her Ladyship guilty of such vulgar unreserve,) and poured out its feelings into the somewhat unsympathizing ear of her reverend uncle, reading to him, as she proceeded with her letter, detached portions of Lady Jane's tantalizing communications, which so stimulated her impatient longings, that she ended with, " And now you are so well, dear uncle, why need we stay a minute longer at this horrid place? I could not survive another month of it.

What might have been the Doctor's reply to this very energetic appeal was known only to the fair appellant; for Vernon, taking advantage of the open door, and being entirely overlooked, had slipt quietly away; and with Lady Octavia's words still tingling in his ears, was in two minutes on his way to the cottage, and to Millicent. In a strange tumult of feeling he bent his steps thither—of sur-

prise and mortification, and bitter self-humiliation and reproach; other thoughts by degrees stole in, like oil upon the troubled waves—thoughts still composed of mingled elements, painful and humbling, yet healing withal—of Millicent and all she had been to him—faithful, patient, and uncomplaining, where there had been so great cause to excite an accusing spirit—nobly unsuspicious of wrong—incapable of envy—inaccessible to mean jealousy, though not insensible—O, no, he felt she was not! —of neglect, which to look back upon, wrung him to the soul; and still, still, ill as he deserved it of her, his own—his loving Millicent—his better angel—his future wife—and well should the devotion of all his life to come strive to compensate for his temporary dereliction! Then came across him a shuddering recollection of the increased languor and feebleness, which, on two or three late occasions, he had observed and spoken of to herself; but she had made light of his question, and he had not dared have recourse to Nora. Nora and he had, indeed, by tacit consent, for some time avoided speaking to each other; and if they chanced to encounter, Vernon had hurried past, without raising

his eyes to a face where he would have been sure to read searching accusation.

All these thoughts were busy in his heart as he pursued his way to the cottage, and—for they had melted him to a tenderness of which he wished to subdue the outward indication—by the longest road —that which ran along the back of the village street and the cottage garden—the very lane where, close by the honeysuckle arbour, in that very garden he had been arrested the first evening of his arrival at Sea Vale, by the sweet sounds of Millicent's voice, mingled with the manly tones of her father's. And there again Vernon's heart smote him; his parting promise to his departing friend!—how had it been fulfilled? "But it is *not* too late, thank God!" he exclaimed aloud; and starting onward, he quickened his step towards the orphan's dwelling, as if to hasten the ratification of his vows, and take her to his heart then and for ever. But, at the turning of the green lane, he was overtaken by his old medical friend, Mr. Henderson, who, without slackening the pace of his ambling pony, merely said in passing—"Good-morrow, Mr. Ver-

non! You are on your way to the cottage, I see; you will find Miss Aboyne better to-day."

"Better! has Miss Aboyne been ill? Pray, sir! Mr. Henderson!"—and Vernon starting forward, caught the pony's bridal-rein in the eagerness of his alarm.

The good apothecary looked at him with grave surprise, as he answered, with some severity of tone, "Is it possible *you* can be ignorant of the very precarious state of Miss Aboyne's health, Mr. Vernon? But seeing her, as of course you do, daily, you may not have been struck with the great personal change which has been for some time perceptible to me." Alas! many days had passed of late, during which Vernon had found no leisure hour for Millicent, and this was now the third day since he had seen her. How the fact, as if he were then first aware of it, struck home to his conscience!—and with what miserable apprehension he questioned and cross-questioned the apothecary! and drew from him an explicit avowal, that although he did not consider Miss Aboyne's case by any means hopeless, it was so critical, that her life hung as it

were by a single thread, of which the slightest agitation, the most trifling imprudence, or any untoward circumstance, might dissever the frail tenure. "And to be free with you, Mr. Vernon," the old man continued, laying his hand on Vernon's shoulder, as he spoke with glistening eyes and a more unsteady voice—for he had known Millicent from her childhood, and felt for her an almost paternal interest, which had not been diminished by certain lately held conferences with the indignant Nora, whose tale, however, exaggerated, tallied but too well with his own preconceived suspicions—"to be free with you, I will add, that I fear, I greatly fear Miss Aboyne's *present* malady proceeds as much from moral as physical causes, and that you will do well to shield her, with the most watchful tenderness, from every disquietude it may be in your power to avert. That gentle spirit of hers, and that tender frame, were not made to 'bide all blasts,' Mr. Vernon. Take care of her; she is well worth keeping;" and so saying, the old man extricated the rein from Vernon's hold, by quickly spurring on his pony, and was soon beyond the

reach of further questioning, leaving the questioner still rooted to the spot, with food enough for bitter reflection to keep him there—*how* long he knew not—before he recovered himself sufficiently to enter the cottage.

The porch door stood open, as did that of the little parlour; but the room was empty. Millicent had been recently there, however, for her handkerchief lay on the table beside a portfolio and some loose sheets of music. Throwing himself into the chair she had occupied, Vernon sat for some moments, his eyes fixed with unconscious gaze on the objects before him, till, half rousing himself from that abstraction, he began listlessly to turn them over, and at last his attention was arrested by a half-torn sheet that lay apart, with Millicent's handkerchief. The paper was wet. More than one drop—from what source he too well divined—had recently fallen on the words of a song which he well remembered having formerly given to Millicent, with a laughing injunction to make herself perfect in the old ditty against her day should come. The words ran thus—a quaint "auld-warld" conceit:—

"Unhappy lady! lay aside
Thy myrtle crown, thy robes of pride;
A cypress stole befits thee now,
A willow garland for thy brow.

For thou art changed, and changed is he
Who pledged thee love's first fealty:
A lover's pledge! a lover's vow!
And where is he? and what art thou?

At younger beauty's feet, with sighs
And silken oaths, thy false love lies:
A thing forsaken!—that thou art,
With faded form, and broken heart.

And now, poor heart! be wise, and crave
Of earth no guerdon but a grave—
And hark! 'ding! dong!' that timely bell,
(*Their* wedding peal) shall ring thy knell,

And lay thee by the church-path side,
When forth he leads his bonny bride;
And then, perhaps, he'll cry, 'Adieu,
My fond first love!—so passing true!'"

Other drops had mingled with those yet glistening on the lines of that old song before Vernon (still holding the paper) let fall his arms upon the table, and bowing down his head, concealed his face within them. He had continued thus for some time, and so deep was his abstraction, that he was perfectly unconscious of an approaching footstep, or that he was no longer alone, till a soft hand touched

his, and looking up, he met the dewy eyes of his wronged Millicent fixed upon him with an expression of angelic pity. That look set wide at once the floodgates of his before almost uncontrollable emotion, and starting up, he caught her to his bosom with a passionate suddenness, that, accompanied by half-intelligible words of love and self-reproach, almost overpowered her gentle and timid spirit. But soon recovering from the momentary agitation, she mildly soothed him to composure; and said, half smiling, as she softly drew the old song from his unconscious hand—"Dear Horace! I never doubted your heart—I never feared desertion."——"Bless you for that! Millicent, my beloved! my only love! —but can you—can you forgive?"——"That you have sometimes forgotten me of late, Horace?" ——"No, not forgotten—not forgotten, as Heaven shall judge me, Millicent!—but—I have been bewildered—infatuated—mad—I know not what; and yet my heart was here; nay, nay, look not incredulous, Milly!—here—here only, as I hope for—and did you not say you never doubted *that*?—Repeat it, my beloved!—tell me again you never doubted me, my generous noble-minded love!"——"I never

doubted your affection for me Horace!" repeated Millicent, with tender seriousness;—"but now, my dear friend! sit down beside me, and let us both be calm, and talk together quietly and unreservedly, as it befits friends to"——"Friends! no more than friends, Milly?—is it come to that?" vehemently exclaimed Horace, with a reproachful look.——"And what name more sacred, more endearing?" she rejoined, in tones less faltering than before—"Friends here, and hereafter, and for ever, in that better place where, sooner or later, whatever is reserved for us here, I trust we shall meet again, and be as the angels in heaven."——"And here—here, Millicent! are we to be *no more* than friends?—Have you forgotten, that within two little weeks you would have been my wife, if those fatal strangers!—but they will be gone before three weeks are over, and then"——"And then, dear Horace! it will be time enough to talk of—of"—our marriage day, she would have added, but her voice suddenly failed, and with a quivering lip she turned her face away from him, till the momentary weakness was overcome.

It was soon mastered; and then, once more rais-

ing to his her not unmoistened eyes, she continued, " I have been wishing, earnestly wishing, for such an opportunity—such an opening as this, dear Horace!—to pour out my whole heart to you—to reconcile you to your own, in case of an event, for which, I fear, I think you may be entirely unprepared, and which I know you would feel too painfully, if now, while we have time, we did not exchange mutual confidence and forgiveness for any wrongs fancied or——"

But she was passionately interrupted—

" Now!—while we have time!—an event for which I am unprepared!—Millicent! Millicent! what mean you?—But I deserve this torture!"—and grasping both her hands in his with convulsive violence, he gazed in her face with such a look of fearful inquiry, as wellnigh unnerved the poor Millicent, and rendered her incapable of reply.

But, making a strong effort for composure, she spoke again—at first only a few soothing and affectionate words to still the agitation that excited her tenderest compassion; and then, impressed with the seriousness and solemnity of the task she had imposed upon herself, she went on, with quiet firm-

ness, to tell him of what had been so long upon her heart, though, till that moment, she had not found courage to impart it to him—*time* or *opportunity*, she might have said—but that would have sounded accusingly, and Millicent lived only to bless and to console.

"My dear Horace," she continued, "hear me patiently—hear me calmly—for my sake do so. For some time past I have felt a conviction that I should not live to be your wife;—nay, nay, start not so fearfully at these words—look not so shocked, so self-accusing, Horace!—But for you—but for your care and kindness, I should long ago have followed my dear father. But you kept me here; and I thought then it was God's will that I should live, and become the companion of your life. That thought was very sweet to me, dear Horace!—too sweet, perhaps, for it made life too dear to me. But since—of late, as I have told you, I have had reason to believe that such was not God's pleasure—Nay, let me—let me speak on now, Horace! now that I am strengthened for the trial!—and do not, do not think, dearest!—for I interpret that look—that he has stricken me by the hand I loved.

I was not made for duration, Horace!—You know my mother died early of consumption—I was not well before my father's death; and that great shock! —so sudden—and——"

"And *I* have done the rest!—I, wretch that I am!—Tell me so, Milly!—tell me so at once, rather than stab me with such mockery of comfort;" and, no longer able to restrain himself, even for her sake, he started from her side, and paced the room in agitation, that she wisely suffered to subside before she attempted to resume her affecting subject. "But it is not too late, Millicent!—angel!—thou wilt yet be spared, that I may repay with life-long tenderness thy matchless excellence;" and then, melted to softer feelings, he flung himself beside her, and, clasping her to him, gave way to a passion of womanish tears.

When both had in some measure recovered composure, Vernon was the first to speak again, though in an agitated whisper:—"Tell me, my beloved! Oh, tell me, you will try to live for my sake!—I know, I see how blind I have been—how madly blind to your increased indisposition. Fool! idiot! that I was! I heard of it, for the first time, this morn-

ing, from Mr. Henderson; but he told me—he said —indeed, indeed, Milly! our good friend thinks, that, with care and watchfulness, all will go well again. And such care!—such watchfulness as I shall take now!—Oh God! Oh God!"

And now their tears mingled; for Millicent's rolled fast down her pale cheeks, and it was many minutes before she again found utterance, and that her secret prayer for strength was answered, and she was able to speak to him words of peace and comfort.

"I know—I know," she faltered out at last, "that I may yet recover, if such be God's pleasure, my Horace! for in His hands are life and death. But, my beloved! if you would endeavour to reconcile yourself to a contrary event, I should be well content to go, for methinks the bitterness of death is past; and—do not call it unkind, Horace! —I doubt whether I could ever again, under any circumstances, be so happy in this world as I have been. I feel as if the capabilities of earthly happiness and usefulness were dead within me—as if I had already left my youth and prime of days at an immeasurable distance; and such a companion would

ill suit you, Horace! would ill assort with your buoyant spirit, and unsubdued energies. But God's will be done! He will order all as is best for us; and if I live, and you continue to wish I should become your wife——"

"If I continue to wish it!—Oh, Millicent!"

"Then, then, dear Horace! I would only say—May God bless our union!—but if it is *not* to be, I do not tell you to remember me; I know you will do that; but I would bid you, for my sake, torture not your own heart with self-upbraiding. Assign all—the ordering of all—as indeed is only fitting, to the will of Providence;—and—and—if my poor Nora should be unjust and unreasonable in her grief, bear with her dear Horace, and be kind to her still, for my sake. This little dwelling!—I have taken some order about it, and her. The long-expected living will be yours at last;—and then I have so arranged it—you will not disapprove it, Horace?—that this cottage may be let or sold, and so furnish a provision for my faithful Nora. Forgive me, that I pain you thus, dear friend!—and yet, a few words more. Oh! my dear Horace! be watchful of yourself. We have all much

need to pray against the deceitfulness of our own hearts. The world and its ways would cheat you, Horace! for I know your heart. Oh, I have longed thus to pour out the fulness of mine—my whole spirit, if it might be—in one appeal to yours:"—And, elevated by the solemnity of that appeal, and by the fervour of her enthusiasm, Millicent's voice became full and firm, though its tones were deep as if sent up from the bosom's inmost sanctuary, and her countenance was irradiated by more than earthly beauty, as, clasping her pale thin hands together, she looked up in Vernon's face, and slowly articulated, "Above all, my father's friend! mine own dear friend! so run the race that is yet before you, that, though mine is first finished, we may meet at last in the land where there shall be no more separation." The awful pathos of that affecting prayer, though it thrilled through the heart of Vernon, subdued his impatient spirit and agitated nerves to solemn stillness. He attempted no audible answer—words would have been powerless to express his feelings; but Millicent felt and understood all the assurance she desired to receive, in the tears that moistened her clasped hands, as,

taking them between his, he bent his face upon them in the long and profound silence that succeeded to his violent emotion.

Horace Vernon laid his head that night upon the pillow by many degrees "a sadder and a wiser man" than he had arisen from it in the morning. But sleep came not to his eyelids, nor rest to his spirit, till utter exhaustion procured him, towards morning, a short interval of troubled slumber.

Lady Octavia was not long in perceiving the decline, or rather cessation of her influence over Vernon. But attributing his defection to resentment at the unguarded sentence which had escaped her in his presence on the perusal of Lady Jane's letter, she only read in it the indication of a more profound passion than she had yet felt certain of having inspired him with. But after a few days of condescending sweetness, fruitlessly expended in manœuvres to lure back the startled quarry, she began to suspect that, whatever was the cause of Vernon's *brusque* retreat from her boudoir, and of his subsequent *refroidissement*, he was now detained from her by a return to his first allegiance, of which her Ladyship had by no means calculated

the possibility, while the light of her attractions still blazed in competition with the pale star of Millicent.

Piqued at this discovery, Lady Octavia's heart was forthwith vehemently set on what would otherwise (in the near prospect of departure from Sea Vale) have been a matter of comparative indifference to her—the recovery of her former ascendency; and, nothing daunted by first failures, she worked at her purpose with all the energies of those great co-operating powers—woman's will and woman's wit, supported by woman's perseverance. But even those combined forces had wellnigh experienced signal defeat, so entirely had Vernon's revived affection and reawakened fears for Millicent, and his bitterly compunctious feelings, engrossed every faculty of his soul since that notable morning when the trifling incident of Lady Octavia's momentary incaution had been so influential in arousing him from his long illusion. Influential as it had been, however, in the first instance, by sending him forth in that mood of mortified and bitter feeling, which, rather than any worthier cause, had impelled his first hasty steps

towards the long-deserted cottage, the better thoughts that, in his way thither, had gradually superseded his previous irritation—his short but startling conference with the good apothecary—and last, and above all, that affecting interview with Millicent, had so effaced all recollection of the paltry annoyance which had originally disturbed him, that it was first called to his recollection by the almost deprecating tenderness of Lady Octavia's voice and looks, when she found an opportunity of addressing him unobserved; and that was not very speedily obtained, for, except at the dinner hour, and some short portion of the after evening conceded to Dr. Hartop's claims, Horace scarcely absented himself from the cottage for many days, after that which had so effectually aroused him from his long and culpable infatuation. Before the little casement of Millicent's chamber was unclosed, he was looking up towards it as he paced the walk beneath with nervous impatience; and even his conscience-struck reluctance to confront Nora, was overcome by his anxiety to obtain from her the first and most exact report of her gentle mistress. A painful surprise awaited Vernon the first morn-

ing he was thus early at the cottage. Long after the little casement above had been partly opened, and he had seen Nora pass and repass before it, as if preparing to assist Millicent at her toilet, he had awaited for some time in the garden—in the dear old arbour, and, lastly, in the little sitting-room, in expectation of Miss Aboyne coming down to breakfast. But finding, at length, that there were not even any symptoms of preparation for the morning meal, he was driven to inquire the reason of such unusual delay, and then learnt, with a pang that wrung him to the heart's core, (for Nora spared not to speak home,) that, for some time past, Millicent had been too much enfeebled to rise at her accustomed hour, and now habitually took her breakfast in bed. The emotion with which Vernon listened to this startling corroboration of his fears, still trembled in the tone of his voice as he hurriedly remarked, "Why, Nora! surely it was not so long ago, that when I breakfasted here last——"

"Oh, no! Mr. Horace; not so long, to be sure," interrupted the faithful servant, with a look that spoke, and was meant to speak, keenest reproach; "not more than a fortnight maybe, or perhaps three

weeks—no time at all—only people may be dead and buried, and forgotten too, you know, Mr. Horace, in less than that. The last time you were to have breakfasted here, you were so thoughtful as to tell Miss Aboyne over night that you would come next morning; so the dear child would rise, and make me dress her to be ready for you—she was too ill then to dress herself, poor heart!—though I told her it was ill spending her precious life upon one that little deserved it of her."—"Little indeed!" groaned Horace, as he turned abruptly from Nora and the cottage, to breakfast where and with what appetite he might.

But Horace Vernon's versatile feelings and unstable nature, characteristics often leading to results as fatal as those consequent on the indulgence of violent and evil passions, were as easily elated as depressed; and, in truth, his mind was not so constituted as to be long capable of enduring or retaining a deeply painful impression. By degrees he deluded himself into the belief that he had been too seriously alarmed, though not too soon awakened. And indeed his now tenderly unremitting watchful-

ness of the drooping Millicent, was soon rewarded by such a reviving brightness of spirit in her, as in a manner reflected itself outwardly on the fair and fragile frame, which at all times sympathized but too faithfully with the fine essence it enshrined. It is true Millicent herself replied only by a grateful smile, or an evasive word—not always uttered with a steady voice—to Vernon's fond entreaties that she would acknowledge herself to be regaining strength—that she would bless him with some assurance that might confirm his sanguine hopes. But Mr. Henderson's manner and replies were more decidedly encouraging. Even Nora began to look less coldly, and by degrees more cheerfully, when he encountered her in his frequent visits; and at last, one evening as he was leaving the cottage, she not only vouchsafed to resume her old office of opening the garden gate for him, but said, in a half cordial tone, as he was passing, "Good night, Mr. Horace! keep a good heart, and all may end well yet."

"Bless you! thank you! thank you! dear, dear, sweet lovely Nora!" was Vernon's rapturous exclamation, as, dashing back the closing gate, so as

almost to upset his old friend, he hugged her round the neck with such schoolboy vehemence of delight, as left her wellnigh breathless and half indignant, though not quite unaccustomed in former days to such ebullitions of his volatile spirits.

Her rebuke (if she uttered one) was, however, quite lost on the offender. Before she had time to set her cap straight, or smooth down her ruffled neck-kerchief, he was already half way to the Rectory, which he re-entered that night in a frame of mind so overflowing with happiness, security, self-reconcilement, and universal benevolence, as reflected its own hues on all surrounding objects, animate and inanimate. Dr. Hartop was agreeable—Lady Octavia enchanting—all but her charms and obligingness forgotten or forgiven—(what was any woman's heart to him but Millicent's?)—her harp and voice in exquisite tone—his own vocal powers and his flute in the happiest unison with both; Dr. Hartop gradually sank to balmy slumbers; music was discontinued in consideration for his repose; conversation succeeded—"the feast of reason and the flow of soul"—of course restricted, on the Doctor's account, to the low key and sub-

dued tones that sound so sweetly confidential; and when, on his awakening, bed-candles were lighted, and Lady Octavia, taking hers from Vernon, and gracefully paying her parting salutation to Dr. Hartop and himself, withdrew to her own apartment, she just turned her head on entering it to glance down the passage, at the end of which Vernon was still unconsciously holding open the drawing-room door, as he gazed after her receding form, and softly said to herself, with a quiet inward laugh, a curled lip, and an eye of infinite meaning, "Ah, ah! je te rattrappe, fine mouche! Sauve toi si te pourras."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Rector's departure from Sea Vale was at length fixed for the second week in September; but when the final arrangements were made, Lady Octavia found herself condemned to accompany her uncle during his month's residence at Exeter, instead of immediately joining the gay autumn party at Falkland Court. A short time back, such a *contre-tems* would have severely tried her Ladyship's philosophy, but within the last fortnight Vernon's premature return to his old colours had piqued her into a determination, *coute qui coute*, to bring him back to hers, if but for a week, before she gave him his final discharge; and a scheme was now shaping itself in her creative imagination which promised, not only to effect that purpose in the most satisfactory manner, but to wile away some of the horrors of her stay at Exeter—horrors in-

finitely greater, in her estimation, than those of rural retirement; and she hailed as quite providential certain waking visions, which substituted the handsome curate and his flute, moonlight music and moonlight walks with him in old bay windows and echoing cloisters, for chimeras dire of portly canons and their dignified spouses—solemn dinners—silent whist-tables, and all the dull ceremonial of an ecclesiastical court circle.

During the last fortnight of Dr. Hartop's stay at the Rectory, the family party had been augmented by the arrival of a brother of Lady Octavia's, the Reverend Arthur Falkland, who came down to Sea Vale for the united advantages of shooting and sea-bathing, and Millicent readily accepted Vernon's apology from stealing from her a few of those hours that he would more willingly have devoted entirely to her, in order to show due attention and courtesy to his Rector's guest and nephew. No day past, however, without his visiting the cottage—few during which he did not look in more than once or twice on its lonely mistress; and if his visits were each time shorter, and his manner more unequal and pre-occupied, she assured herself that, circum-

stanced as he then was, nothing could be more natural or excusable. "And it will only be for a few days longer, Milly," said he. "Thank God! only three days longer; for this is Saturday, and on Monday they depart—and then dearest, dearest Millicent! we shall be once more all the world to each other." Tear's came into Vernon's eyes as he uttered the last words; and after a short pause, during which he had been gazing upon Millicent with troubled yet tender earnestness, he vehemently added, "Would to God they were already gone! would to God I had never seen them, Milly!"—And his painful agitation distressed the affectionate heart of Millicent, who endeavoured to sooth him with every tender and comforting assurance, best calculated to reconcile him to himself, and allay what she conceived to be the sudden storm of compunctious retrospection.

That evening, whether in the fond weakness of her heart, yearning to give comfort, or that she really began to entertain hopes of prolonged life, (still dear—how dear to her if to be passed with Vernon!) for the first time since her danger had been made known to him, she spoke of the future—

of an earthly future; looked at him almost believingly when he talked of their union; and did not shake her head, nor smile as she *had* smiled of late, when he talked of it as an event that was now assuredly to take place before the close of that autumn already entered upon. Once or twice, indeed, she seemed to shrink, as if from hope; but it was evident, at least it seemed evident to Vernon, that she did not turn from it as formerly; and as with him there was no medium between despair and joyful certainty, he hailed her doubtful encouragement as a pledge of perfect security, which would justify him for having acceded to a plan which he had hitherto hesitated from communicating to Millicent, though he had entered the Cottage that morning with the express purpose. Now, however, there was no reasonable cause to deter him from speaking. All was so safe—Millicent so well, and in such good spirits!—so, without further deliberation, he said smilingly, but with somewhat of a hurried tone, and a forced gaiety of manner,—

"Milly! do you know I must have one long braid of that smooth raven hair, (which is so becomingly arranged, now you have humoured me

by leaving off that dowdy cap,) by way of talisman, to bind me to you during four—five days—it may be a whole week—of separation."

Millicent started, and the hectic of a moment suffused her pale face, but she only looked her surprise; and Vernon went on to explain, rather confusedly, while he was profitably busied in unrolling her ball of sewing thread, that Dr. Hartop had given him such a pressing invitation to accompany him and Lady Octavia to Exeter, and be their guest during the musical festival, which was to take place the week ensuing, that he felt it would have been not only ungracious, but ungrateful, to decline the courteous proposal;—"and so, dearest Millicent," he continued, looking up from the handy-work on which his eyes had been fixed with intense interest during the first part of his communication, "I have promised to go,—that is, with a mental reservation that you continue well enough for me to leave you without anxiety for those few days, and that you will not feel uncomfortable at my doing so."

While Vernon was speaking, Millicent had time to recover from the painful emotion into which she had been surprised by his unexpected information;

and inwardly rebuking herself for its unreasonable selfishness, she said promptly and cheerfully,

"You did quite right, dear Horace. I am so well that I can spare you safely, and shall enjoy with you, in imagination, the musical treat that will be to you such a real banquet. On Monday, you said—the day after to-morrow—and to stay till——?"

"Only till the Saturday ensuing—I intend—I believe," replied Horace to her look of anxious inquiry. "At *farthest*, the *Monday* after; and in that case, Falkland, who stays on some weeks at Sea Vale, would take my duty."

"But you will not stay away longer—not much longer?" hesitatingly, yet almost imploringly, rejoined Millicent, in a lower and less cheerful tone, a sudden shade slightly clouding the serenity of her mild countenance. "I am very nervous still, and may not long continue so well as I am now; and then, if any change should take place. Nay, do not look so disturbed, dear Horace—I am so well now!—but do not stay away *too long*."

"I will not go—I will not go, Milly! if it gives you one moment's pain, dear girl!—But how is

this, Milly?—a minute agone, and you spoke so cheerfully and hopefully. And now—that quivering lip!—those glistening eyes!—Millicent! my beloved! what means such sudden change?"

"Forgive me, dear Horace! I am ashamed of my waywardness—of my caprice," she faltered out, concealing her face, now bathed in tears, against Vernon's shoulder—"But it is the infirmity of my enervating malady—the effect of weakness—of unstrung nerves; and sometimes an unbidden thought suddenly crosses and subdues me, and I cannot restrain these foolish tears. But they always do me good, Horace; and after the shower comes sunshine, you know," and she looked up at him, as she spoke the last word, with still dewy eyes and a faintly brightening smile, that beautifully illustrated her simple metaphor. But the humid ray scarcely broke out into cloudless sunshine, though she recovered perfect serenity, and would not listen for a moment to Vernon's reiterated, but rather fainter proposition, of wholly relinquishing his intended excursion.

"Remember," said he, as they stood together in the Cottage porch, just before he left her that

evening—" Remember, Milly, I am to take away with me one of those ebon locks. If it is not ready for me to-morrow, I shall cut it off myself. I wish I had your picture, Milly !"

" I wish you had, dear Horace," she quickly answered ; " I have often wished it lately—I should like you to have it; but there is my father's, *that* will be yours, Horace ; and it is so like me, you know, you will never look upon it without thinking of me."

" Without thinking of you, Milly ? Shall I not have *yourself*, your own dear living self, as well as that precious picture we shall so often look upon together ?"

" But, dearest Horace, if it should be otherwise, if that picture *only* should become yours, place it somewhere where you may see it often when you are *alone* and in your quiet hours of serious thought. But do not look so very serious *now*—I spoke but of an ' *if*,' a passing thought. To-morrow I shall send you away cheerfully."

" If you do not, Milly, here I remain, be sure. A word would keep me—only half a word. Speak it, beloved ! I almost wish you would." But she

spoke not, and, bidding her an affectionate farewell for the night, he was turning to depart, but lingered yet a moment to point out to her a small white rose-bud, which promised yet to blossom in its sheltered corner. "Look, Milly," he said, "'The last rose of summer.' Your favourite rose will yield you yet one blossom. Before it is full-blown, I will be here to pluck and place it in your bosom." Words lightly spoken sometimes sink deeply into loving hearts, especially under circumstances such as Millicent's, where physical causes acted morbidly upon a mental system, by nature sensitive, and perhaps not wholly free from a taint of superstitious weakness. From that hour the rose became her calendar, and she watched its unfolding leaves, as if their perfect expansion was to be the crisis of her fate.

By what means, or under what pretences Lady Octavia had succeeded in obtaining for Vernon an invitation to accompany Dr. Hartop and herself to Exeter, matters little to the reader of this story. The success of her Ladyship's manœuvres has been sufficiently illustrated by the preceding conversation. The day that intervened before that of his

departure being Sunday, Vernon was detained from the Cottage during a great portion of it by his clerical duties. Then his assistance was required at the Rectory in packing up certain portfolios, albums, and various nicknackeries, not to be safely intrusted even to the invaluable Jenkins, so that, although he contrived to look in two or three times upon Millicent, each visit was but for a few hurried minutes, the last briefest of all. And well for her that it was so; for though she had successfully struggled through the day to maintain a semblance of cheerful composure, and had indeed partly reasoned herself out of what she meekly accounted unreasonable disquietude, as evening drew on, the mental excitement subsided, her spirits seemed to ebb away with the departing daylight, and she felt as if they would hardly hold out "to speed the parting friend" with that cheerful farewell with which she had promised to dismiss him. Vernon also had his reasons for brief leave-taking; but his adieus, though fondly affectionate, were more than cheerful, hurried over with a voluble gaiety, and an exuberance of spirits that seemed hardly natural. "Till Saturday, dearest!" were his parting words;

and before Millicent's long-restrained feelings had broken out into one choking sob, before the brimming tears had forced their way over her aching eyelids, he was out of sight and out of hearing, though the garden gate still vibrated with the swing which had closed it behind him. And the lock of raven hair, which was to be his "talisman," which Millicent had not neglected to make ready as he had enjoined her, though with womanly coyness (womanly feeling rather) she had hesitated to give it unclaimed—He was gone, and had forgotten to claim it!

The middle of the third week, from the day of Vernon's farewell to Millicent, found him still at Exeter. Shall we tell how the time crept at Sea Vale in his absence? or how it had flown with him in that world of novelty to which he found himself transported? or shall we count over, link by link, "the chain of untoward circumstances" (so he wrote of them to Millicent) which had caused him to prolong his absence from her so long beyond the term he had pledged himself to at parting? Alas! it is but too easy to picture to one's self the feelings of the lonely invalid—the first sharp pang of

disappointment—the sickness of hope deferred—the sinking of the spirit into utter hopelessness. And it would be tedious and distasteful to enumerate all the frivolous excuses alleged by Vernon for his continuance at Exeter, excuses which, for a time, however, were more indulgently admitted by the generous, unsuspicious Millicent, than satisfactory to his own heart, and slumbering, though not seared, conscience. Yet he had partly succeeded in stilling, though not stunning the inward accuser. "Millicent's first letter had been cheerfully and cheeringly written. She was undoubtedly well—so well, that a few days, more or less—" But it was easier to drive away reflection altogether than, by resorting to it, to acquire perfect self-justification—so he fled from himself and his own thoughts to the syren, in whose charmed presence all but his own captivations were forgotten.

Lady Octavia's attractions had not, however, achieved, unaided, the triumph over Vernon's best resolves—it might well be said over his best principles; and still their power had extended over his imagination only, leaving his heart true to its first affection, if *true* that preference may be called

which, when put to the test, will sacrifice no selfish gratification, no unworthy vanity to the peace and welfare of its ostensible object. Every thing combined with her Ladyship's witchery to complete Vernon's mental intoxication. A whirl of dissipation, consequent on the provincial gathering for the Musical Festival, of which Lady Octavia condescended to be the presiding deity, no other high-born or fashionable beauty being at hand to dispute her pre-eminence; the marked favour with which he was publicly distinguished by this goddess—the admired of all eyes, the envy of many—and the general notice and consideration it obtained for him, and the still more dangerous influence of her seductive sweetness and varied powers of charming, in those frequent *tête-à-têtes* which she had anticipated with so much sagacious prescience "in antique bay windows and shadowy cloisters;" the perpetual excitement of music, of dancing, of novelty, where all was new to him:—every thing conspired, together with Lady Octavia's arts and the weak points of Vernon's character, to complete that intoxication which was at its height about the time (the third week of his stay at Exeter,) when,

in pursuance of our task as a faithful chronicler, we must resume a more circumstantial detail, though still as brief as may be, of his further progress.

In the miscellaneous assemblage drawn together by the music meeting, Lady Octavia's discriminating survey had found in the male part of it no individual so qualified to do credit to her taste and patronage as the handsome, and interesting, and really elegant Vernon; and so interesting did he become, in the daily increasing intimacy of familiar intercourse, so rapidly developed under her Ladyship's fostering encouragement, were his latent capabilities for "better things," as she was pleased to express herself; and to such advantage did he appear among all surrounding competitors, that had the fair Octavia been of those with whom

> "Un peu d'amour, un peu de soin
> Mene souvent le coeur bien loin,"

there is no saying how far beyond its original design "*le roman d'un jour*" might have extended. But her Ladyship's heart, not composed in the first instance of very sensitive atoms, had been laid to

harden so effectually in the petrifying spring of fashionable education, as to have become proof to

"Cupid's best arrow, with the golden head,"

if not shot from the vantage ground of a broad parchment field, cabalistically endorsed with the word "settlement;" and having achieved her vowed triumph, by "fooling Vernon to the top of his bent," she began to suspect the pastime had been sufficiently prolonged, and that if the delirium, she had worked up to a crisis, were not timely checked, she might find herself publicly committed, in a way that would not only militate against her own *serious* views, but probably come to the knowledge of Dr. Hartop, and incur his severe displeasure.

Lady Octavia was far too well-bred to give the cut direct to any body, and too "good-hearted" to inflict more than unavoidable mortification on a person, for whom, as she expressed herself to the confidential Jenkins, she should always retain a compassionate interest. But while she was meditating how to

"Whistle him *softly* down the wind,"

Fate stepped in to her assistance in the shape of an old acquaintance, who very unexpectedly made

his appearance at Exeter with a party of friends, with whom he was on a shooting excursion.

Lord George Amersham was one of those persons, who, without being very young, very handsome, very clever, at all wealthy, or in any way "a *marrying* man," had, by some necromancy, so established his supremacy in all matters of taste and ton, that his notice was distinction, and his favour fame. No wonder that suffrage so important was *briguées* by all female aspirants for fashionable ascendency; and Lady Octavia had been so fortunate as to obtain it on her first coming out. The appearance of such a star in the provincial hemisphere, to which she was condemned *pro tempore*, would at all times have been hailed by the lovely exile as an especial mercy, but "under existing circumstances," (to use the diplomatic phrase,) she esteemed it quite Providential, as nothing now could be so easy and so natural as the transfer of her attention from Vernon to her old acquaintance.

The former was soon made sensible of the change, though at first more surprised and perplexed at it, than aware of the systematic alteration of Lady Octavia's deportment. But his obtuse perceptions

were soon to be sufficiently enlightened. A subscription ball, which was to take place on the second night of Lord George's stay at Exeter, was also to be honoured by the presence and patronage of Lady Octavia Falkland and her party, including the noble sportsman and his friends—Vernon as a matter of course—Doctor Hartop as a matter of necessity—and, as one of convenience, a deaf and purblind old lady, the relict of a deceased canon, who made herself useful in a twofold capacity—ostensibly as Lady Octavia's chaperon, and veritably as an unwearied sitter-out of (she could not be called a listener to) Dr. Hartop's long stories, and an established member of his select whist set. This party had dined at the Rectory, and Lord George's rank having of course entitled him to conduct Lady Octavia to the eating-room, and take his seat beside her, it was equally a matter of course, (the other guests being also men of pretensions if not of rank,) that the bottom of the table and the deaf old lady, who had been duly marshalled out by the Doctor, should fall to the lot of Vernon, whose proximity to the door, however, secured him the office of holding it open

for the ladies when they should pass to the drawing-room. But just at that moment, Lady Octavia, actuated perhaps by some compunctious consciousness that her attentions had been too entirely engrossed during dinner by her neighbours at the upper end of the table, was seized by a fit of such extraordinary cordiality towards the canon's deaf relict, that she passed her fair arm with affectionate familiarity within that of the worthy old lady, and began whispering something in the lappets of her cap, which lasted till they reached the stair-foot, and the dining-room door had closed behind them. Lord George and two of the other gentlemen accompanied Dr. Hartop and the ladies to the ball-room, in the Doctor and Mrs. Buzby's carriages. The third walked thither with Vernon, and when they entered the Assembly-room, Lady Octavia was already dancing with one of Lord George's friends. When her partner, after the set was over, had conducted her to a seat, Vernon drew near, with the hope (expectation it would have been a few nights previous) of engaging her for the next quadrille. But she was still engrossed by her partner, and the others of Lord George's

party, himself having comfortably established himself on the best half of the sofa, of which she occupied a corner, entrenched behind two of the gentlemen, who were conversing with her, so that Vernon could only proffer his request, by speaking it across Lord George, so audibly, as to make him colour at the sound of his own voice, with a painful consciousness of awkward embarrassment, which was not diminished by perceiving that his words were wasted "on the desert air," at least that they had only drawn on him a grave stare from Lord George, and the eyes of many surrounding loungers, though the Lady Octavia's were perversely fixed in an opposite direction, and she appeared perfectly unconscious not only of his address, but of his vicinity. Just then a space was cleared for waltzing—the magic sounds set twenty pairs of te-totums in rotatory motion, and Lord George, who "never danced," languidly, and, with apparent effort, roused himself from his recumbent posture, and, to the no small amazement of Vernon's unsophisticated mind, without addressing a word to Lady Octavia, or farther ascertaining her consent, than by passing one arm round her

slender waist as she arose from the sofa, whirled her off, seemingly "nothing loath" into the giddy circle. Vernon was suddenly sensible of a vehement longing to breathe the fresh air, and contemplate the beautiful moonshine. We cannot exactly pronounce how long he indulged in solitary meditation; but when he re-entered the ball-room, the waltz was over—an after set of quadrilles just finished, and the dancers were crowding about the refreshment tables.

Vernon mechanically mingled with the throng, and in a few minutes found himself very undesignedly posted behind Lady Octavia and Lord George, who was supplying her with ice and sherbet, and finishing some speech of "infinite humour," at which her Ladyship was laughing as heartily as it was admissible that lips polite should laugh. "Now really, my lord! you are too severe," murmured those lovely lips between the spoonful of ice. "You are too hard upon my pastor fido—an excellent obliging creature, I assure you—really quite civilized, and has been infinitely useful to me in that horrid desert. No such 'Cymon' either, as you call him; and as for Iphigenia—the fair Octavia

will not confess having charitably enacted that character—her delight is to do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame."

"But seriously though—this pastoral pet of yours—this Mister——by the by, what a vastly appropriate name!—this Mister Verdant—"

"How can you be so excessively absurd!" uttered the lady, convulsed with inward laughter at his Lordship's wit—"you know his name's Vernon; *I* call him 'Le Beau Lindor.'"

"Le Beau Lindor" had heard quite enough. Backing with such inconsiderate suddenness, as almost to upset good Mrs. Buzby, and a dignitary of the church, in his brusque retreat—he left the ball-room—cleared the stairs at a bound—and by a progress almost as rapid, gained Dr. Hartop's residence, and the sanctuary of his own chamber.—What were his meditations after he had shut himself within it, securing himself by turning the key from possible intrusion, we cannot nicely determine, but may fairly infer they were not of a very philosophic nature, from certain sounds of heavy and irregular footsteps—portentous thumps, and bangs, indicating the violent derangement of fur-

niture, the opening and shutting of drawers, with no gentle and deliberate hand, and the dragging backwards and forwards of a portmanteau; which disturbance was so audible in the hall below, as to excite the wonder and curiosity of the "liveried loungers," one of whom at last tapped at the visiter's door, with a civil request, to know if Mr. Vernon wanted any thing, or had rung his bell. "Nothing," was the short and comprehensive reply, in a tone which interdicted farther intrusion; but all became quiet within the chamber, and by the time the footman had rejoined his fellows of the buttery, its solitary occupant was seated in perfect stillness —a packed portmanteau on the floor beside him —his elbows propped on the table before which he sat, and his face concealed by his two hands, upon the outspread palms of which rested his hot and throbbing temples. "Millicent! Millicent!" were the first sounds that after a spell of profound silence struggled through his scarcely unclosed lips, and half-shut teeth. But it seemed as if his own utterance of that gentle name stung him to agony; for, starting back from the table, he flung out his arm across it with so much violence, as to dash off two

or three books that had been piled together, and now came to the floor with a noisy fall, which apparently aggravated Vernon's irritable mood, for he spurned the volumes with a kick that sent them sprawling in all directions, but left on the spot where they had fallen, a letter which, in the general dispersion, escaped from its hiding place within one of their covers. That letter caught Vernon's eye, and in a moment he was fixed, still, motionless, almost unbreathing as a statue, gazing on that small white square of folded paper, as if a serpent lay coiled before him. And there was cause—full cause and weighty—for that shrinking, yet fascinated gaze. That letter was from Sea Vale—from Millicent. Five days before it had been placed in Vernon's hand, and the seal was yet unbroken! It had been brought to his chamber door, just as he had caught up his hat and gloves, to attend Lady Octavia, who was waiting for him in the hall, on a picnic excursion to some picturesque spot, in the vicinity of Exeter. He held the letter for half a minute—his hand was on the seal, and yet he felt at that moment that he would rather defer the perusal of its contents. An impatient summons came

from a silvery voice below—Vernon started—gave one look to the direction—one kiss to the well-known characters, and slipt the unopened letter within the covers of a book that lay on the table, to be flown to, to be read in undisturbed quietness, the moment of his return. Five days ago that letter had been so deposited. There it had remained till the present moment, untouched, unread, unremembered! And Vernon—how had he passed that interval? What were his feelings, when suddenly before him lay that mute accuser?—"Madman that I have been!" he groaned aloud, and sinking into a chair, his tears fell fast on the unnerved fingers, that could with difficulty break open the seal, which had been too long inviolate. Millicent's letter, which enclosed another, ran thus:—

"My dear Horace,

"You desired me to open any letters which might arrive for you while you were absent. I have done so by the enclosed, which I forward to you immediately; for, as you will see, it is one that concerns you nearly—that calls you to take possession of the long-promised living. I thank God,

my dear Horace, that I have lived to congratulate you on this event; and I pray God to make it blessed to you; and to bless you in your faithful service here, and in the reward of it hereafter. But this is not my only reason for pressing your return —your *immediate* return to Sea Vale, even—(was I ever before so selfishly exacting, Horace?)—even should inclination, or any cause short of necessity, detain you at Exeter. You will soon again be at liberty to return thither, or to seek the society of your *other* friends, wherever they may be. There will be time enough for *them*—for all—but not for me, dear Horace. Therefore, for your own sake more than mine, come,—come soon, come *very* soon, or (for I know the kindliness of your nature) you will afterwards reproach yourself with a bitterness, the sting of which I shall not be permitted to extract, nor to sooth the only pain I shall ever have caused you, Horace. I am not so well—not nearly so well as when you left me; I cannot leave my bed now, or sit up in it for more than half an hour at a time; and even the writing these few lines exhausts me, so you see you *must* come soon—very, very soon, if—But I need not urge it

—I know you will be with me directly—almost, and that I shall have time and strength left to thank and bless you—and comfort you, dear Horace; and that we shall yet talk together—pray together—Oh, yes! and that I shall receive from your hands, the pledge of our immortal hope—of our certain reunion. M. A."

An abler, a far abler narrator than I am, might well shrink from attempting to describe Vernon's feelings as he read this letter, or their first frantic ebullition after he had perused it. For some moments all within him was anarchy and distraction. Agonies of remorse and terror, and images of death crowded upon each other in hurrying confusion, like the phantasmagoria of a frightful dream—and his ears rang with an imaginary cry, "Too late! too late!" that withered and benumbed his powers of action, while a contrary impulse impelled them to promptest exertion. The latter soon obtained the mastery, however, and another glance at the date of the letter—that date now six days old!—acted electrically on the mental chaos. In a moment its jarring elements were reduced to comparative order, concentrated in one overruling pur-

pose. It was but an hour past midnight. Four hours' rapid posting would take him to Sea Vale. In less than half an hour he was whirling on his road thither, as fast as fresh horses could tear over the ground, urged on by the relentless lash of a well-bribed driver; and in spite of various detentions at the several stages, while tired post-boys were roused from their heavy slumbers, and galled cattle dragged from their short rest—(Oh! how interminable seemed every moment's delay!)—in spite of these and other trifling hinderances, he reached the hill-top that overlooked Sea Vale, before the stars began to "pale their ineffectual fires," in the uncertain dawn of a dull, cheerless, October morning. The village below was distinguishable only as a black shapeless mass, lying in the deep shadows of the surrounding hills. Only one twinkling light gleamed at its entrance, from the lamp-post of the single inn; yet Vernon strained his eyes through the darkness, on—on—towards the more distant dwellings, till he fancied he could descry the well-known gable—the tall round chimney—the two shadowing elms—among the confused and indefinite outline of trees and buildings.

It was but imagination—the rapid portraiture of memory; but his heart beat quicker at the fancied sight, and leaping from the carriage, he left it to pursue its more leisurely way towards the Inn-yard, and rushing down the remainder of the declivity, sprung over a stile into a meadow-path, which would take him by a short cut though a field or two, into the green lane, the back way to the Cottage. That way was so familiar to him, that, to his eye, every object was as recognisable by that dim light—that "darkness visible," as it would have been at noon-day; and what emotions—what recollections pressed upon him, as he leapt the last gate into the bowery lane—as he trod once more its soft greensward, now thickly strewn with a rustling carpet of autumnal leaves—as he passed the grey spectral-looking stems of the two old thorns at the corner of the garden hedge. And as he pursued his way along that memorable path, every and each one of those inanimate uncertain shapes, stood out with ghastly distinctness to his mind's eye, and he gazed on them with such intensity of vision, as if he could have read in the aspect of those senseless things, some intimation of the

nature of that dread certainty which, nevertheless, as the decisive moment drew near, he shrank from ascertaining. As the Cottage really became visible, and a patch of its white walls now and then discernible through the leafless fence, a cold shuddering ran through his whole frame, and he stopt abruptly, as if an unseen hand had checked his progress. All was darkness on that side the Cottage. No light from within streamed through either of the small lattices—but only Nora's sleeping room lay that way. Millicent's—the sick chamber, opened to the front. Was it still only the chamber of sickness? Alas! that miserable hope! But it was the more dreadful doubt that still delayed Vernon's onward steps—that seemed to stagnate the very current of his blood, so deadly was the weight and sickness that hung about his heart. A minute more—he had only to turn the corner of that small dwelling, to cast up one look at the well-known window, and suspense would terminate; for surely, he said within himself, a light would beam from that chamber if life were there—"if life!"—and then the unhappy man shudderingly repeated—"Six days!—six days! and she was dying!" But the agony of that re-

membrance nerved him to desperate resolve, and rushing forward, in another moment he stood facing the chamber window. There *was* light within!—"then life!"—was the rapid overpowering conclusion, and suddenly all strength forsook him—the young and vigorous frame felt feeble as infancy, and tears—quiet tears, rolled fast down his agitated face, as leaning for support against one of the old elm trees, he continued to gaze earnestly, with feelings of unutterable gratitude, on that pale star of comfort. The light was very pale and feeble, (true emblem, alas! of his most sanguine hope,) for that of the gray dawn began to contend with the waning watch light, and to give distinctness to the near external objects. A muslin blind was drawn within the lattice, but through its thin texture, Vernon could discern the white curtains of the bed, and at the other end of the chamber a high bracket, on which stood the night-lamp, before a large china vase which Millicent had always been wont to keep replenished with flowers or evergreens.

To what trifles (as drowning creatures cling to straws) will the miserable, the almost hopeless,

cling for consolation! Vernon's heart beat more equally—his breath came freer at sight of that insignificant object, for the vase was filled with verdure. Were the boughs fresh or withered? He drove away the officious suggestion, for his soul yearned for the faintest shadow of comfort. If not *her* hand, Nora's had filled the vase. The dear one herself, therefore, must still be susceptible of pleasure from objects which would cease to interest the dying. Was it yet possible? But though Hope's passing whisper was eagerly caught at, Vernon dared not *dwell* upon its soothing sweetness. He dared not anticipate—he dared not think—and now he would have given worlds to exchange that terrible stillness which yet pervaded all things—that bodily inaction to which he was condemned—for the universal stir of human life, and some occasion that should call upon him for violent corporeal exertion. Any thing, every thing, would have been welcome, which might have afforded scope for the nervous restlessness that now agitated his whole frame, to expend itself, or have gained the slightest relief—the most transient diversion of thought—for the mental fever, which increased with every

lingering moment of suspense. But as yet, except the expiring gleam of that pale watchlight, no sign or sound of life was seen or heard within the Cottage; and, without, so profound and death-like was the hush of nature, that Vernon could have fancied its mighty pulses had stood still, or beat only in his own throbbing arteries.

The gloomy daybreak advanced so tardily, that none but quite near objects were yet visible through the sea of white, unwholesome vapour, that now seemed melting into drizzling rain—now condensing itself into a solid wall around the Cottage, and a few yards of its small territory. The dank moisture clung like transparent glue to the bare, leafless branches of the deciduous trees; and, collecting into large globules at the extremities of the heavy drooping heads of the dark evergreens, and along the Cottage eaves, dropt to the ground with sullen plashes, dismally breaking, at intervals, the otherwise universal silence.

Vernon still watched the casement of that little chamber, within whose walls his all of earthly interest—his hopes, his fears, his very being—hung suspended upon a dread uncertainty—a flitting life

—a fluttering breath—perhaps at that very moment passing away for ever!

All hitherto had remained quiet in the chamber. Suddenly, a figure passed slowly across, between the curtained window and the bed's foot—a tall, dark figure that could be only Nora's. It was stationary for a moment before the lamp, which, as day advanced, had condensed its pale rays into a small red globe of flame, and that dying spark was gone, when the tall form moved away from the spot where it had been, and advanced towards the window, which was partially unclosed, and a wrinkled hand and arm put forth from beneath the still drawn blind to secure the lattice.

"And the morning air, so cold and damp, to breathe on that dear sufferer!—Could Nora be so incautious?" And Vernon advanced his hand unconsciously, as if to close the casement. But he was unnoticed from thence, and the female form receded.

"Now then," thought Vernon, "now in a minute, I shall know my fate,"—and passing stealthily through the little gate (for he did not wish his footsteps to be heard in the sick-chamber,) he ad-

vanced close to the house, of which the front door was still fast, and the lower shutters unopened. Awhile he stood beneath the porch, listening for the approach of some one from within, to whom he might make cautious application for admittance; but soon impatient of fruitless waiting, he moved away to steal round the corner of the cottage and seek admittance at the back entrance. As he stept guardedly from the porch, his eyes glanced on a large white rose-tree that grew beside it, and struck with sudden recollection, he stopt to look sorrowfully on the well-known shrub. There were yet a few yellow leaves upon the straggling branches, and many ripening berries, indicating the past profuseness of its summer bloom. But from the stem on which Vernon's eyes were riveted with painful interest, the flower-sprig he looked for had been recently cut off. "The last rose of summer," had not been left to wither on its stalk, though the hand was far away that should have stuck the late blossom in Millicent's bosom. Just as Vernon turned the corner of the building, he heard the withdrawing of a bolt from the kitchen door, and as it slowly opened, he was moving forward with nervous

precipitation, when the sight of a stranger startled him for a moment from his purpose, and before he had time to recover himself and accost her, the young girl, carrying a milking stool and pail, was already half way down the garden walk in her way to the field and cow-shed. A word—the slightest sound would have reached and recalled her, but Vernon shuddered and was silent. Again—as the decisive moment drew near, he shrunk from certainty—especially from a stranger's lips. He would seek Nora—he would learn his fate from her. So suffering the young girl to pass on out of sight, he gently pushed open the door which she had left a-jar, and stole noiselessly into the kitchen. Its comfortless disordered state sadly contrasted the beautiful neatness and arrangement, which had been wont in happier days to distinguish poor Nora's peculiar territory. The hearth was heaped with ashes of long accumulation, and the embers of a fire that had evidently burnt all night, still emitted a feeble warmth, and dull red light from the lower bars of the grate, to which they had sunk far beneath the trivet and large black kettle, from which issued no cheerful morning sound of bubbling water.

Unwashed tea things, with fragments of bread, butter, and cheese, and an end of tallow candle turned down into the pool of grease which had accumulated in the deep tin candlestick, were huddled together on the slopped and soiled little round table, that it had been Nora's pride to keep bright and polished as a looking-glass. Scattered plates and cups, a waiter with cut and squeezed lemon, and other evidences of late attendance on a sick room, were all noted by Vernon with deepest interest, and if the survey relieved him of his worst fears, he sighed heavily at thoughts of the *best* he had to anticipate. A glass half filled with lemonade stood on a salver on the dresser; he raised, and put it to his lips, (for perhaps *hers* had recently touched its brim,) and as he did so, called to mind her affecting desire to receive from his hand another cup, which now he might be so soon called on to present to her. "If it *must* be—strengthen me for the task, oh God!" was the inward ejaculation of a heart that could yet scarcely bring itself to add, "Thy will be done."

Still Nora appeared not; and reasonably concluding that, leaving the young char-woman to attend

to household concerns, she had kept her station in the sick chamber, he stole from the kitchen along the matted passage towards the staircase—but the door of the little parlour being open he mechanically stopt at it. The shutters had been removed since he looked at the windows from without, and now the formal arrangement of the furniture—the cold, dreary, uninhabited look of the once cheerful little sitting room, struck him forcibly, with a more painful sense of change, than even the unwonted disorder of poor Nora's kitchen. As he stood on the threshold in mournful contemplation, a shrill sound (one of discordant loudness to his morbidly sensitive ear) broke the deep silence. It was the awaking note of Millicent's canary bird, whose cage hung near the window; and as the little creature began to plume itself on the perch, and pour out a more sustained matin in its innocent joy, Vernon looked reproachfully at the unconscious favourite. But his attention was soon directed to other objects (all to him how eloquent!) and at last it rested on a vacant spot on the wall opposite. He started at perceiving that Colonel Aboyne's picture which used to hang there, had been removed, but only as

it seemed to a table in the middle of the room, on which lay a framed picture together with a white paper parcel, which was placed upon its glazed surface. Vernon felt as if the whole current of his blood rushed suddenly to the heart and brain. A moment he stood gazing as if spell-bound—then, with one desperate impulse sprang forward, caught up the parcel—ascertained that the portrait beneath was indeed his friend's—his promised legacy! and tore open the paper, which was superscribed in faint and uneven characters, "For my dear Horace." Frantically he tore it open—but *one* glance at its contents, and his fingers relaxed their hold—his sight became dizzy, and he reeled back for support against the wall. What baleful aspect had paralyzed him thus? That only of a withered rose, and a long lock of glossy raven hair.

In some minds (happily constituted are those!) how indigenous—how indestructible—how elastic is hope! After awhile it faintly revived in Vernon's bosom, from the seeming annihilation that succeeded that sudden shock. But feeble, indeed, was the reviving struggle—an expiring effort! a last stand against despair. *Almost* the worst was known.

But still a possibility remained, the thought of which perhaps helped to nerve Vernon's resolve to know *all* immediately. Without farther pause or deliberation, but still with noiseless footsteps, he ran up the short flight of stairs that led to Millicent's sleeping room—and, with cautious tread, and held in breath, stole to the half-open door. All within was profound stillness—and he stopped on the threshold to listen, and to send forward one fearful glance. The white curtains of the bed were close drawn on the side towards him, as he stood still half behind the door—but he fancied—surely it was *not* fancy—that there was a stir of life—of breath—a gentle and scarce perceptible rustling—as if some one moved. His heart beat quicker, as he advanced a step onward, and then beheld Nora seated in a high-backed chair at the farther corner of the bed's foot, towards which her face was turned, and her eyes fixed in the direction of the pillows, with that solemn and profound interest, with which we watch the slumbers of those who are "sick even unto death." But, apparently, she had only desisted for a moment from an employment, the nature of which Vernon's first glance eagerly detected. Her

fingers still held the strings of one of Millicent's plain mourning caps—(he *knew it* well) the broad hems of which she had been running and crimping with accurate neatness, and across her knees and the arm of the chair, lay a long white dressing gown. Was there not evidence of *life* in those provident preparations? He began to fear—Oh blessed fear! —that he might disturb the dear one's slumbers, should his unexpected appearance too suddenly startle her faithful nurse—whose strongly marked countenance, told a fearful tale to Vernon, of all she had lately undergone. But just as he was shrinking back from the chamber, her eyes slowly returning from this mournful contemplation to her suspended task, caught sight of his receding figure—and strangely was she affected by the apparition. No word—no exclamation or sound escaped her lips;—nor did she move from her chair—nor otherwise testify her consciousness of his unexpected presence, than by drawing up her tall gaunt figure as she sat, erect and rigid to its utmost dimensions, and fixing on him her large dilating eyes, with a ghastly undefinableness of expression which chilled his very heart's blood, though he had no power to

withdraw his own from the unnatural fascination; and when, after a few seconds of that wordless communion, she arose slowly, and standing still and upright on the same spot, without one feature relaxing from its stony fixedness, beckoned him forward with one hand, while with the forefinger of the other she pointed to the bed's head, he obeyed mechanically—almost unconsciously—till he felt the grasp of that cold bony hand; and, following with his eyes the direction of her pointing finger, beheld all that was still mortal of Millicent Aboyne.—The immortal spirit had ascended to Him, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

THE END.

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY J. JOHNSTONE,
18, ST. JAMES'S SQUARE.

This book is DUE on the last
date stamped below

MAR 6 1936

5m-2,'31

PR
5459 [Southey] -
S72c Chapters on
v.2 churchyards.

Delayed Paging

PR
5459
S72c
v.2

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES
LIBRARY